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**JoCTH**

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## EDITORIAL

As the Chief Editor, I am incredibly proud to present this inaugural edition, a significant milestone for our journal. We successfully published 15 papers, exceeding our target of 10, reflecting the growing depth and diversity of tourism research in Malaysia and beyond. This achievement is strengthened by the participation of three international authors from Uzbekistan, Thailand, and Indonesia, along with contributions from schools and travel agencies, showing strong collaboration between academia and industry. We are honoured to include insights from Dato' Dr. Mohmed Razip Hasan**,** former Director General of the Islamic Tourism Centre (MOTAC**)** and Deputy Director General of Tourism Malaysia**.** With a distinguished career spanning leadership, policy, and international representation, he brings deep practical wisdom to the academic discourse on tourism. His ongoing advisory roles reflect his continued commitment to tourism development.

The papers in this issue cover broad yet connected themes in tourism. Sustainability is highlighted through studies on *green transportation among Generation Z*, *bicycle tourism*, and *sustainable camping practices*, reflecting rising environmental awareness. Inclusivity and Muslim-friendly tourism feature in works on *Muslim women in adventure tourism*, *budget hotels*, and *service quality in Muslim-friendly hotels*, emphasizing cultural and faith-based dimensions of travel.

Innovation and technology are also well represented. Studies on *design thinking for tourism innovation* and *mobile applications and airline loyalty* illustrate how digital tools enhance competitiveness and engagement. Cultural and community-based research, including *Pasar Seni*, *signage perceptions in Muar*, *heritage tourism in Kelantan*, and *community readiness in Kampung Chitty*, showcase efforts to sustain local identity and participation.

Education and safety are equally important in this collection, with works on *Usrah and edutourism*, *language learning among tourism students*, and *child safety in water theme parks* linking tourism to youth development and family well-being.

Overall, this first issue demonstrates a strong foundation of collaboration, creativity, and relevance. The diversity of topics and contributors reflects a vibrant research community bridging culture, sustainability, and innovation. Looking ahead, the journal aims to expand its reach by inviting submissions from more countries and institutions, further strengthening its global and interdisciplinary impact.

Sincerely,
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mazni Saad
Chief-in-Editor

SPECIAL PAPER

JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY KSTCL IIUM

**JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY RESEARCH** (JoCTH), Kulliyyah of Sustainability Tourism and Contemporary Languages, IIUM

**Review Paper**

# POSITIONING OF ISLAMIC TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY IN MALAYSIA

By Mohmed Razip Hasan

**ABSTRACT**

This paper examines the destination positioning of Islamic tourism and hospitality in Malaysia, tracing its development and current performance. It explores the rise of Muslim-friendly travel, the guiding principles of Maqasid al-Shariah, its intrinsic relationship with the Halal industry, and recent national strategic changes. Based on extensive desk research, the findings confirm Malaysia's ongoing commitment to this sector through the adoption of Muslim-friendly practices. The paper concludes that this values-based approach not only solidifies Malaysia's global leadership but also offers a sustainable model for other countries to follow.

**Keywords:** Destination Positioning; Halal Principles; Islamic tourism; Maqasid al-Shariah; Muslim-friendly travel

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an encourages travel and exploration as a means of observing creation and experiencing divine mercy. This spiritual mandate is articulated in Surah Al-'Ankabut: *"Say, O Muhammad, 'Travel through the land and observe how He began creation. Then Allah will produce the final creation. Indeed Allah, over all things, is competent'"* (Qur'an, 29:20). From an Islamic perspective, tourism is therefore not merely an avenue for gaining knowledge and experience; it is an opportunity to contemplate the Creator by reflecting on the natural world. Such journeys are intended to broaden the worldview and deepen the humanity of the traveller. This paper will first define key concepts such as Islamic tourism and Halal principles before providing a snapshot of Malaysia's tourism history. It will then analyse the rise of Islamic tourism globally and discuss Malaysia's strategic positioning, challenges, and opportunities within this framework.

*Islamic Tourism* is defined as any activity, event, experience or indulgence, undertaken in a state of travel that is Islamically compliant, with the purpose to interface within an Islamic framework, with one or all of the following – nature, history, arts, culture, heritage, way of life, economy, health and wellness, education, business, civilization and other human interests (Islamic Tourism Centre [ITC], n.d.). Meanwhile, *Muslim friendly* is a concept of positioning a destination to attract Muslim travellers to visit the destination for holiday, business, and other purposes that are within the Islamic principles and values. (ITC, n.d.).

Destination positioning refers to the process of determining a destination's competitive advantages, selecting appropriate target market segments, and establishing a distinct value proposition based on these factors (Kotler et al. 1993). Ries and Trout (2001) assert that *positioning* is not an action performed on the product itself, but rather a strategy directed at influencing the prospect's perception. Positioning involves establishing the product's place in the mind of the prospective customer.

While the term *"Halal"* refers to foods and products that are permissible and lawful under Islamic or Shariah law, forming an essential principle for Muslim consumers (Al-Basirah, 2023), *"Toyibban"* is defined as wholesome and of high quality, meeting rigorous standards of hygiene, safety, and overall integrity to ensure they do not adversely affect mental, spiritual, or physical health, which apply to anyone, including Muslims and non-Muslims (Al-Basirah, 2023). Subsequently, Maqasid al Shariah refers to five core objectives of Islamic law, which protect the religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property that apply to various aspects of public life and governance (Department of Islamic Development Malaysia [JAKIM], n.d.).

### 1.1 Islamic Tourism

Hall and Prayag (2020) note that engaging in travel and broadening one's understanding of the world represent fundamental elements of Islamic practice. They further suggest that international travel by Muslims- commonly referred to as Islamic Tourism- has grown into a substantial market for both Muslim-majority and non-Muslim-majority countries with sizable Muslim populations. Islamic tourism is experiencing rapid growth in domestic and international markets. Its strategic importance is increasingly recognized across regions, including ASEAN, Asia Pacific, Africa, the Americas, and European countries, aiming to attract leisure and business travellers. While originally tailored for Muslim tourists, these initiatives have also attracted non-Muslims interested in related attractions, cultural sites, and history.

### 1.2 Islamic Hospitality

There is a pressing need to appreciate the significance of Islamic tourism and hospitality across diverse global contexts. Tourism integrates various domains of hospitality, providing critical insight into the ways individuals welcome strangers and others. Hospitality serves as a space for self-reflection on ethical and moral behaviour. Hospitality is essential for uniting people across political, cultural, and religious divides, as it tests whether stated values are put into action. The true measure lies in how individuals receive others within homes, public spaces, nations, and commercial hospitality venues (Hall & Prayag, 2020). In this context, it is pertinent to consider how these principles apply to Islamic tourism, specifically how hospitality functions as a channel for communicating and exemplifying Islamic values and principles to guests and visitors.

### 1.3 Halal Principles

This is emphasised in Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:172, *'O you who believe! Eat of the good things that We have provided you with and give thanks to Allah if Him alone you worship.*

The principles of halal and toyibban (permissible and healthy) play a significant role in promoting Islamic travel and tourism, encompassing not only food and beverages but also various other facets of hospitality and permissible practices. The rise of halal tourism presents enhanced opportunities for cross-cultural interaction and marketing collaboration between Muslim and non-Muslim communities (Wilson et al., 2013). Aligned with the expansion of the halal sector and growing worldwide demand among Muslim travellers, Islamic tourism has emerged as a significant segment of the global tourism industry. With over two billion Muslims worldwide, there exists substantial potential for outbound travel commensurate with individual capacity and affordability. The global halal market is forecasted to reach USD 5 trillion by 2030 (Halal Development Corporation [HDC], 2023). Furthermore, halal products and services are widely trusted by Muslim consumers and are also chosen by a considerable number of non-Muslims globally.

### 1.4 Why Malaysia?

Malaysia is highlighted here as an exemplary model, given its dynamic development and leadership in the field of Islamic tourism and halal industry. Malaysia has introduced the "Muslim-friendly Tourism" (MFT) brand concept, which has since developed into "Muslim-friendly Tourism and Hospitality" (MFTH).

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Tourism in Malaysia: A Snapshot

Tourism has been formally recognised as a vital economic sector in Malaysia after Independence (Merdeka).

#### 2.1.1. Establishment of the National Tourism Organisation for Malaysia

The Department of Tourism was formed under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in 1959. To further advance the sector, the government enacted the TDC Act 1972, leading to the creation of the Tourism Development Corporation Malaysia (TDC) in 1972. Significant investments were made during this period to develop tourism infrastructure across major destinations, including the construction of hotels, resorts, convention centres, cable cars, visitor centres, duty-free outlets, and the enhancement of road networks, highways, airports, railways, and sea terminals. The industry has continued to evolve, supported by progressive policies, improved facilities, and robust support systems. In 1987, the Ministry of Culture, Arts, and Tourism was formed (has undergone several restructurings and is now known as the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture -MOTAC), which assumed responsibility for policy formulation, regulatory matters, development initiatives, and infrastructure oversight. Later in 1992, TDC was restructured as Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board (MTPB), commonly known as Tourism Malaysia, with a strengthened focus on promoting Malaysia both internationally and domestically.

### 2.1.2. Establishment of Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC)

Recognising the significant potential within Muslim travel, the Malaysian government established the Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) in 2009, under MOTAC, to serve as a catalyst for both domestic and international advancement in Islamic tourism. Over the past 15 years, the ITC has delivered notable achievements and received recognition from a range of organisations, both locally and internationally, including the OIC and its entities - SESRIC, COMCEC, and SMIIC, as well as ASEAN and the D8 Secretariat.

### 2.1.3 Tourism Campaigns

Malaysia has strengthened its international tourism branding through initiatives such as the "Malaysia Truly Asia" campaign, complemented by the "Cuti-Cuti Malaysia" program aimed at the domestic market. Earlier branding efforts included campaigns like Magical Malaysia and Fascinating Malaysia, which were launched in conjunction with Visit Malaysia Year (VMY) observances in 1990, 1994, 2007, 2014, and 2020 (rescheduled to 2026 due to Covid-19). The country has also organised major events such as Malaysia Fest, Flora Fest, Malaysia Sports, and the Recreational Year 1998 held alongside the Commonwealth Games, the Malaysia Years of Festival in 2015, and Citrawarna (Colours of Malaysia). In 2024, Malaysia welcomed 37.9 million foreign visitors, marking a 31.1% increase compared to 2023. This growth contributed to RM106.8 billion in tourism expenditure, up 43.7% from RM74.3 billion the previous year. Domestic tourism comprised 37.96 million trips (Tourism Malaysia, 2025). While long-haul, medium-haul, and short-haul markets all remain important, ASEAN countries continue to represent Malaysia's largest source of tourists, with additional significant contributions from Northeast Asia, South Asia, West Asia, Europe, Oceania, and America.

Malaysia is targeting over thirty-five million tourist arrivals in 2026 to generate RM147.1 billion in receipts, as part of the fifth iteration of the Visit Malaysia Year 2026 (VMY2026) initiative. (Source: Tourism Malaysia Strategic Roadmap for VMY2026). In support of this campaign, the country is proactively positioning itself to attract global Muslim travellers for leisure, sports, recreation, medical, and business purposes, focusing on both Muslim-majority nations and countries with substantial and sizable Muslim populations.

## 2.2 The Emergence and Rise of Islamic Tourism

The September 11, 2001, incident has shifted Muslim travel patterns from traditional destinations in the United States and the Middle East (Mat Ghani, 2019) to neighbouring Muslim-majority countries such as Malaysia. This transition led to increased segmentation and distinct trends within Muslim travel markets.

Muslim populations have increasingly engaged in both domestic and international travel, a trend attributed to rising disposable incomes and enhanced quality of life. The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) comprises fifty-seven member states, collectively representing approximately 2.01 billion individuals or about 26% of the global population (SESRIC, 2024/2025). These nations offer numerous prominent and highly attractive world-class tourism destinations. Annually, large numbers of Muslims undertake the pilgrimage of Umrah and Hajj. It is common for pilgrims from Southeast Asia to extend their journeys beyond Umrah, visiting various cities across Saudi Arabia as well as countries including Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Türkiye, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Palestine, and the Balkans. These locations are renowned for their rich Islamic history, heritage, diverse civilizations, unique lifestyles, artisanal crafts, and internationally acclaimed tourist attractions and resorts.

According to CresentRating's 10th Edition – 2025 MasterCard CrescentRating Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI), Islamic tourism is demonstrating significant growth. International Muslim arrivals are expected to reach 176 million by 2024, representing a 25 percent increase over 2023 and exceeding 2019 figures by 10 percent. Projections indicate this upward trend will continue, with forecasts of 195 million arrivals in 2025 and 245 million by 2030, which could generate an estimated USD 235 billion in expenditure.

The State of the Global Islamic Economy Report (SGIE 2024/2025) reported that global Muslim travel spending reached USD 133 billion, marking a 53.2 percent rise from 2022. In 2024, Malaysia welcomed 5.4 million Muslim tourists, up from 4.5 million in 2023, resulting in RM 19.54 billion in expenditure compared to RM 14.7 billion in the previous year (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2025).

### 2.3 Guiding Principles

The foundation of Islamic tourism positioning lies in Islamic values and principles, operating within the wider framework of the Islamic economy and contributing to national economic growth. When planning for infrastructure, supply chains, financial instruments, technology, logistics, tourism product and service development, marketing and promotions, tour programmes, and travel itineraries, stakeholders such as policy makers, planners, project managers, and tourism service providers are guided by the five core objectives of *'Maqasid al-Shariah,'* which serve as the ethical and purposeful framework for travel. These objectives include: (i) Hifz al-Din (*Preservation of Religion*), (ii) Hifz al-Nafs *(Preservation of Lif*e), (iii) Hifz al-Aql *(Preservation of Intelle*ct), (iv) Hifz al-Nasl *(Preservation of Lineage/Fam*ily), and (v) Hifz al-Mal *(Preservation of We*alth/Property).

## 3. DISCUSSION

Building on its established tourism infrastructure and global leadership, Malaysia's continued success in Islamic tourism hinges on sophisticated destination positioning. This requires a comprehensive understanding of traveller demographics and psychographics, involving analyses of travel behaviours, brand preferences, and market potentials. Destinations offer tourists unique experiences and lasting memories. Effective destination positioning strategies require establishing a distinct and memorable identity that differentiates a location from competitors in the minds of potential visitors. This principle applies equally to Islamic tourism, where destinations must identify their comparative advantages, select targeted audiences, and develop a clear value proposition to attract both Muslim and non-Muslim tourists, while pursuing economic development and socio-spiritual objectives. Developing a consistent and robust brand image aligned with these propositions is critical, as is leveraging modern communication channels and technologies in advertising, public relations, and sales to reach diverse audiences.

### 3.1 Global Leadership

Through strategic planning, the implementation of focused action plans, and robust support mechanisms, Malaysia has established itself as a leading destination for Muslim travellers. The country maintains its global leadership in Muslim-Friendly Tourism, as recognised by the GMTI and SGIE, supported by strong government policies, prioritised tourism and infrastructure development, an active halal ecosystem, and strategic collaborations with industry stakeholders. This leadership is attributable not only to Malaysia's position as a Muslim-majority nation but also to ongoing advancements in tourism policies and evolving sector strategies. The Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) has developed the *Islamic Tourism Strategic Plan (ITSP) 2021-2025* to align with the National Tourism Policy. This plan encompasses post-COVID-19 recovery initiatives, technology integration, such as virtual seminars for skill enhancement and meetings, data infrastructure improvements, certification and recognition programmes, training provision, research, and sustainable product and service development. Furthermore, it reinforces ITC's advisory role and aims to position Malaysia as a Centre of Excellence for Muslim-friendly tourism and hospitality.

### 3.2 Muslim Travellers' Behaviours

The 2025 GMTI reports that Muslim travellers are increasingly seeking independent, purpose-driven trips, with solo and female travellers emphasizing empowerment, safety, and autonomy. Their motivations now include generative tourism like digital detox retreats, local ecosystem initiatives, and family-friendly sports aligned with faith values. This shift is also seen in the adoption of modest fashion and Muslimah sportswear. The hospitality industry is evolving with the growth of Muslim-focused brands highlighting Islamic heritage and values (SGIE 2024/2025).

### 3.3 Muslim Friendly Hospitality Brands and Certification

Malaysia has sixty-eight hotels (local and international brands) certified as Muslim friendly by the Islamic Tourism Centre, expanding to include spa and wellness services for Muslim guests. Malaysia, through the Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC), in 2020 launched the official logo for the Muslim Friendly Accommodation Recognition Programme (MFAR), signifying a pivotal advancement in Islamic tourism within the country. This initiative has garnered the involvement of both international and domestic hotel brands, including Mardhiyyah Hotel and Suites Shah Alam, Tamu Hotel Kuala Lumpur, Movenpick KLIA, Raia Hotel chains, Sunway Hotels and Resorts, Royal Chulan, Dorsett Hotel, Pullman, and Double Trees. To broaden the original concept and scope of MFAR, it was subsequently redefined as the Muslim-Friendly Tourism and Hospitality Assurance and Recognition. The expanded programme now encompasses spas and wellness centres, medical facilities, transportation hubs, shopping centres, theme and entertainment parks, rest and recuperation areas, tourism products, as well as trade and convention centres.

### 3.4 Training and Skill Development

Malaysia stresses the importance of talent management, training, and skill development. To accommodate Muslim tour groups as well as non-Muslim groups interested in experiencing Islamic tours, the Muslim Friendly Tourist Guide (MFTG) programme has been introduced for bona fide licensed tourist guides, regardless of their religious backgrounds. These initiatives have placed Malaysia at the forefront of equipping the tourism industry with the necessary certifications and competencies. This effort is increasingly important as destinations continue to prioritise enhancing their Muslim-friendly offerings by seeking halal certification and improving their ratings (GMTI, 2025).

### 3.5 Product Development, Marketing, and Collaborations

To ensure the industry remains informed of current trends and opportunities within the Islamic Tourism ecosystem, Malaysia through ITC organizes the World Islamic Tourism Conference (WITC) annually. This event continues to reinforce Malaysia's leading position in the sector. Over four editions, WITC has brought together delegates from travel, tourism, and hospitality, alongside policymakers, planners, and academics. Other key initiatives include Mosque Tourism, Muslim-Friendly Wellness Spa Classifications, the Islamic Tourism Entrepreneurship and Leadership Seminar (ITELS), and Islamic Tourism Month (ITM)—formerly introduced as Islamic Tourism Week (ITW) in 2022—as well as collaborative projects with TV Al Hijrah and Yayasan Ummah Ikhlas through World Qur'an Hour (WQH). Such initiatives have also attracted strong interest within the private sector itself. Malaysia Tourism Agency Association (MATA) has organised the World Islamic Tourism Trade and Expo (WITEX) in 2025 after the successful ASIA Islamic Tourism Trade and EXPO (AITEX) in 2024. These programmes are designed to raise awareness and interest among both industry professionals and consumers, contributing to the evolution of Islamic tourism's business landscape.

### 3.6 Application of Maqasid al Shariah

An evaluation of Malaysia's position in Islamic tourism and hospitality, including its global leadership potential and the need for strategic improvements, must be connected to the principles of Maqasid al-Shariah. Within this framework, stakeholders such as policymakers, promoters, tour planners, sales managers, guides, hoteliers, logistics providers, and others in the supply chain are expected to deliver products and services that *c*omply with Shariah principles, upholding ethical and professional standards free from abuses, corruptions, bias, or suspicion. To this end, it is necessary for tour companies and accommodations to employ qualified halal executives and advisors to ensure compliance with established standards and quality benchmarks. Malaysia, through Standards Malaysia and OIC/SMIIC, has contributed significantly in the formulation of many standards including for OIC/SMICC 9 (Halal Tourism: General Requirement Services) and Malaysia's own standard - MS2610 (Muslim Friendly General Services Requirements) to support the industry's adoption.

In accordance with the *preservation of life,* ensuring tourist safety and well-being, particularly regarding halal food and secure environments, is paramount. Service providers bear the responsibility to implement comprehensive health and safety measures, crisis management systems, and encourage the use of Shariah-compliant travel insurance.

Regarding the *preservation of religion*, service providers are expected to maintain high ethical standards and accommodate religious needs. This includes offering designated prayer areas, suitable ablution facilities, and ensuring that services comply with Islamic guidelines, such as providing halal-certified dining options and allocating separate times for women and families to access swimming pools and fitness centres.

For *intellectual preservation*, operators are encouraged to design programs promoting intellectual engagement and creativity, such as visits to natural landmarks, cultural heritage sites, mosques, museums, and theme parks, while avoiding activities detrimental to cognitive well-being. In the case of event planning for Islamic tourism it requires adherence to Islamic values and principles throughout the process, including the exclusion of alcoholic beverages and non-halal foods, and the selection of modest entertainment, suitable dress codes, and promotional campaign material and contents that aligns with the right intent and reasonable budget. More importantly, the event should promote intellect, knowledge and short and long term benefits.

By supporting the *preservation of family*, Islamic tourism aims to create inclusive environments suitable for families, children, individuals with special needs, and seniors. Immoral activities must always be avoided.

In terms of the *preservation of property*, industry stakeholders are expected to adhere to best business practices, fair trade, and transparency. Sustainable growth requires that products and services meet halal toyibban standards, pricing is fair and riba-free, promotions are ethical, and delivery and payment systems are efficient, effective, safe, and secure.

### 3.7 Challenges and Opportunities

As Islamic tourism serves a diverse customer, it presents both challenges and opportunities for supply chains accommodating varying requirements. Muslim travellers expect provisions for faith-based needs, including access to prayer facilities, halal and toyibban food and beverages, rigorous safety measures, and a sustainable environment respectful of religious sensitivities. The institutions are required to produce clear guidelines for both Muslim and non-Muslim visitors when accessing Islamic-related sites, such as heritage and historical sites, mosques, museums, and cultural and educational institutions. Key challenges include ensuring the availability of halal products and services, employing multilingual licensed tourist guides, fostering an understanding of Islamic hospitality, and providing proper facilities. With a global Muslim population exceeding two billion, considerable potential exists for expansion, especially given the high rates of domestic and international travel among Muslims.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Islamic tourism has experienced substantial growth and is establishing a stronger presence in the global marketplace. It is important, however, that this sector is not viewed solely through a commercial lens. While tourism and hospitality present significant business opportunities and enhance quality of life, Islamic tourism also serves a distinctive purpose: enabling visitors to appreciate and reflect upon the signs of creation as prescribed by faith. The industry adheres to principles rooted in halal and toyibban, sustainability, fairness, justice, and balance, as defined by Maqasid al Shariah. The concept of Muslim-friendly tourism is evolving and extends beyond the leisure market into areas such as medical and wellness tourism, sports, recreation and adventure, gastronomic tourism, cultural exploration, accessible tourism, and business travel. To advance the Islamic tourism sector, destinations and stakeholders are encouraged to adopt innovative strategies, leverage advanced technologies, including artificial intelligence and data analytics, and employ sophisticated decision-making tools.

Islamic tourism and hospitality are guided by a high moral compass covering standards, sustainability, balance, inclusivity, integrity, patience, dignity, and values enshrined in the Qur'an and Sunnah. Industry professionals, particularly those from the Muslim community, are expected to share the responsibility of developing and offering attractive and meaningful Islamic tour packages, activities, and services for potential visitors. This aligns with the principle of *'Rahmatan lil Alamin'* (a mercy to all worlds), promoting universal peace and well-being, universality, inclusivity, ethical frameworks, and best practices, among others. As Islamic tourism continues to reshape the global landscape, it has become an integral part of mainstream tourism, recognized for its unique values and objectives. Effective positioning of Islamic tourism and hospitality requires destinations to embrace modern marketing methods, innovative technologies, reliable and tested crisis management modules, data science, alliances, and a commitment to best governance, sustainability, integrity, transparency, and effective leadership while seeking the Almighty's guidance toward success.

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# Attitude, Subjective Norms, and The Adoption of Green Transportation Modes among Generation Z's Willingness to Travel to Kuala Lumpur

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**ABSTRACT**

As climate change and environmental sustainability gain increasing global attention, the transportation sector, particularly in urban areas, is identified as a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. Adoption of public transportation by tourists remains low, and current strategies often fail to meet tourists' needs and preferences, leading to suboptimal sustainable travel behaviours. This study investigates the adoption of green transportation modes among Generation Z tourists travelling to Kuala Lumpur, focusing on urban public transportation services, including buses, Light Rail Transit (LRT), Mass Rapid Transit (MRT), monorail, and commuter trains. Using the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) as a theoretical framework, this research investigates the attitudes, subjective norms, and public transport adoption among Generation Z. A quantitative research method was employed, with data collected via self-administered questionnaires and analysed using IBM SPSS version 29. By understanding the behavioural drivers of green transportation adoption, this research contributes to developing strategies that enhance the attractiveness and efficiency of public transportation, ultimately reducing the environmental impact of tourism in Kuala Lumpur.

Keywords: Attitude; Adoption of Green Transportation, Subjective Norm

Article Classification: Research Paper

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Climate change is a global issue with profound implications for tourism, as food, shopping, and transportation all contribute to environmental impacts (Leal Filho et al., 2022). Among these modes of transportation, particularly air travel is the largest contributor to the tourism carbon footprint, accounting for over 50% of total emissions in various regions (Rosalina et al., 2023). The tourism sector, historically one of the fastest-growing industries, has significantly contributed to $CO_2$ emissions, leading to environmental degradation, climate abnormalities, and disruptions to ecosystems and communities (Pandit & Sharma, 2023).

Sustainable and green transportation offers a potential solution, utilising renewable energy sources and reducing dependency on fossil fuels. Environmentally friendly transportation options include walking, cycling, carpooling, electric vehicles, and public transport such as LRT, MRT, and buses (Fuelberth, 2023). These alternatives enhance energy efficiency, lower carbon emissions, and promote a cleaner urban environment (Hamim & Jalil, 2024).

Sustainable and green transportation offers a potential solution, utilising renewable energy sources and reducing dependency on fossil fuels. Environmentally friendly transportation options include walking, cycling, carpooling, electric vehicles, and public transport such as LRT, MRT, and buses (Fuelberth, 2023). These alternatives enhance energy efficiency, lower carbon emissions, and promote a cleaner urban environment (Hamim & Jalil, 2024).

However, despite the availability of green transportation options, many tourists, including Generation Z travellers, still prefer private vehicles due to convenience and flexibility. A lack of awareness and perceived inconvenience also contribute to the low adoption of public transport among this group (Deden Irawan et al., 2024). Understanding the factors influencing Gen Z tourists' attitudes toward green transportation is essential for increasing its adoption, ultimately supporting Kuala Lumpur's sustainable tourism goals.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), developed by Ajzen (1980s), serves as the theoretical foundation for this study, explaining how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control shape individuals' intentions to adopt green transportation modes (La Barbera & Ajzen, 2021). TPB has been widely applied across various fields, including tourism and sustainable transportation, to predict behavioural intentions (Yang et al., 2023).

### 2.1 Attitude, Subjective Norms, and Green Transportation

Attitudes refer to an individual's overall evaluation of a behaviour, which significantly influences their behavioural intentions (Hidayati & Destiana, 2023). Studies show that favourable attitudes toward eco-friendly transportation strongly correlate with adoption intentions (Zhang et al., 2021). Green transportation, such as public transit, electric vehicles, and bike-sharing, is often evaluated using a semantic differential scale to measure perceived benefits and drawbacks (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Subjective norms represent the perceived social pressures from important individuals, such as family, friends, and society, influencing behavior (Listiawati et al., 2024). Research suggests that social influences, including peer encouragement and environmental awareness campaigns, enhance tourists' likelihood of adopting green transportation (Khajehshahkoohi et al., 2021). However, while subjective norms affect decision-making, factors like cost and convenience also play a role (Imelda & Rofi'i, 2022). Adoption of green transportation modes is influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Mohammad et al., 2024). Studies highlight that personality traits, environmental awareness, and technological advancements also impact adoption rates (Shetty & Rizwana, 2024). Furthermore, subjective norms can moderate perceived risks, with strong social support reducing concerns about adopting new transport technologies (J, 2023).

The relationship between attitudes, subjective norms, and green transportation adoption is well-documented in existing literature. Positive attitudes, social influences, and supportive infrastructure collectively increase the likelihood of adoption (Nogueira et al., 2023). Additionally, strategic policies and public campaigns promoting green mobility can shift societal norms, encouraging sustainable travel behaviours (Li et al., 2021). This study seeks to further explore these determinants among Generation Z tourists in Kuala Lumpur to enhance green transportation adoption.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative research approach using structured questionnaires to collect data from Generation Z visitors who use green transportation in Kuala Lumpur. In quantitative research, data collection involves systematically gathering numerical data to analyse relationships between variables through statistical methods (Francois, 2022). Quantitative research enables systematic data collection, measurement, and analysis to gain a deeper understanding of social issues (Dev, 2024). Plugge and Shahrokh Nikou (2024) highlights its accuracy and flexibility, making it ideal for exploring the factors influencing the adoption of eco-friendly transportation among Generation Z travellers. To ensure accuracy and reliability, this study conducts pre-tests and pilot testing before distributing the questionnaire. Primary data is collected directly from respondents, ensuring relevance and quality (Xiayahu, 2023). As unprocessed data, it allows for flexible analysis (Proessdorf et al., 2023) and is tailored to the study's objectives (Li, 2022). IBM SPSS 29 is used for data analysis, with results presented through descriptive analysis and inferential analysis.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter examines the data collected from a questionnaire distributed to Generation Z tourists, aged between 12 and 27, who are travelling to Kuala Lumpur. The data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics and presented using descriptive and inferential analysis. This chapter is essential to the study as it provides a detailed description of the questionnaire-derived data.

### 4.1 Descriptive Analysis of All Variables

Objective 1 is to determine the attitude, subjective norm, and adoption of green transportation modes in relation to Generation Z's willingness to travel to Kuala Lumpur. Table 1 indicates the mean values of all variables in this study, ranging from 3.84 to 3.95. Correspondingly, adoption of green transportation modes attributes the highest mean score, which is 3.952, with a standard deviation of 1.681. It was then followed by attitude variables with a mean score of 3.929 and a standard deviation of 1.585. The subjective norm has the lowest mean score, which is 3.845, with a standard deviation of 1.712. These results suggest that Generation Z respondents generally have a positive perception of using Green Transportation Modes.

Table 1. Descriptive Analysis of All Variables

| Variables | Mean Score | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|
| Attitudes | 3.929 | 1.585 |
| Subjective Norms | 3.845 | 1.712 |
| Adoption of Green Transportation Modes | 3.952 | 1.681 |

These findings are aligned with studies of Farliana et al. (2024), which demonstrated that attitudes play a critical role in influencing sustainable travel behaviour. The positive attitude scores in this study reflect the growing environmental awareness among younger generations. This is consistent with findings by Santi et al. (2024), who observed that Generation Z demonstrated a high awareness of environmental issues since they actively seek eco-friendly products and practices in their consumption behaviour.

In contrast, other studies have identified subjective norms as the most significant predictor in sustainable travel behaviour. For instance, Giubergia et al. (2024) found that subjective norms, both descriptive and injunctive, play an important role in shaping transportation choices. The studies showed that normative messages can effectively encourage shifts from using a car to using public transportation, especially when individuals perceive a higher level of behavioural control.

The high mean score for the adoption of green transportation modes suggests a positive trend in the willingness to adopt sustainable practices. This is in line with Altsybeeva et al. (2023), who reported that the enhancement, convenience, and environmental benefits make public transport more attractive to the youth, potentially reducing reliance on personal vehicles. The findings indicate that all variables are of high value in terms of mean, addressing research Question 1 to determine the attitude, subjective norm, and adoption of green transportation modes among Generation Z’s willingness to travel to Kuala Lumpur.

### 4.2 Multiple Regression Analysis

To determine the relationship between factors influencing the adoption of green transportation modes among Generation Z, multiple linear regression was used. The substantial R value of 0.971 indicates a strong correlation between the independent variable and dependent variable. The corresponding R Square value in Table 2 showed 0.943, which signifies that the model explains a noteworthy 94.3% of the variance in the adoption of green transportation modes. This percentage reflects the combined influence of attitudes and subjective norms. Overall, these results suggest a well-fitting model that explains a significant proportion of the variability in the adoption of green transportation modes based on the selected predictors. The high R Square value underscores that these two factors play an important role in shaping Generation Z's willingness to adopt sustainable travel options in Kuala Lumpur.

Table 2. Strongest Predictor of all variables

| **Model** | **R** | **R Square** | **Adjusted R Square** | **Std. Error of the Estimate** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 0.971 | 0.943 | .942 | 2.32014 |

a. Predictors: Attitudes, Subjective Norms
b. Dependent Variable: Adoption of Green Transportation Modes

The ANOVA output table 3 shows that the F-ratio is 1779.944, indicating that the regression analysis was statistically significant overall. Besides, it is important to examine the p-value to determine whether the regression model effectively determines the relationship between the adoption of green transportation modes, the dependent variables, and the other two independent variables, attitudes, and subjective norms. Based on the table above, the results indicate that the regression model is a strong fit, with attitudes and subjective norms significantly explaining the variability of green transportation modes among Generation Z. The Sig. (p) value results in <.001, which is less than 0.05. Thus, this indicated a significant linear regression between the dependent variables, which were the adoption of green transportation modes, and the independent variables: attitudes and subjective norms.

These findings align with the Theory of Planned Behaviour, suggesting that attitudes and subjective norms are key drivers of sustainable behaviour. It highlights the importance of designing interventions that address both individual and social factors to encourage green transportation adoption among young travellers.

Table 3. Anova Table

| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Regression | 19163.043 | 2 | 9581.521 | 1779.944 | <.001 |
| | Residual | 1162.738 | 216 | 5.383 | | |
| | Total | 20325.781 | 218 | | | |

Dependent: Adoption of Green Transportation Modes
Predictors: (constant), Attitudes, Subjective Norms

The coefficient output results show the highest contribution to the dependent variables (adoption of green transportation modes). Table 4 demonstrates the results of the coefficients between two attributes. The first hypothesis suggests a significant relationship between attitude and the adoption of green transportation modes among Generation Z, particularly concerning their willingness to travel to Kuala Lumpur. Findings show that attitude significantly influences the adoption of green transportation modes to travel to Kuala Lumpur, where the P-value is <.001 (B = 0.526, $p < 0.05$), with a standardised coefficient (B = 0.368). Kwak (2023) stated that the variable is significant when the P-value is less than 0.05, and as a result, H1 is supported.

Table 4. Beta Coefficient Table

| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients Beta | t | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | B | Std.Error | | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 0.371 | 0.569 | | 0.652 | 0.515 |
| | Attitude | 0.368 | 0.053 | 0.526 | 6.943 | <0.001 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Subjective Norms | 0.329 | 0.055 | 0.451 | 5.953 | <0.001 |

a. Dependent Variable: Adoption of Green Transportation Modes

The second hypothesis proposed that there is a significant relationship between subjective norms and the adoption of green transportation modes among Generation Z, as well as their willingness to travel to Kuala Lumpur. Findings show that subjective norms significantly influence the adoption of green transportation modes, where the P-value is <0.001 ($B = 0.451$, $p < 0.05$). The standardised coefficient ($B = 0.451$) suggests that subjective norms have a slightly smaller impact compared to attitude. All of the data confirm the significance of this relationship, supporting H2 and demonstrating the importance of social pressures and expectations in influencing sustainable travel behaviour.

In conclusion, both attitudes and subjective norm attributes significantly influence Generation Z's willingness to adopt green transportation modes when travelling to Kuala Lumpur. However, in terms of predictive strength, attitude has a slightly greater impact than subjective norms. Ultimately, this answered Research Objective 3, which aims to identify the strongest predictor of the relationship between attitudes and subjective norms in explaining the variance in the adoption of green transportation modes among Generation Z’s willingness to travel to Kuala Lumpur.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study contributes to theory, practice, and policy by enhancing the understanding of green transportation adoption among Generation Z tourists in Kuala Lumpur. Theoretically, it reinforces the TPB by demonstrating the significant role of attitudes and subjective norms in influencing sustainable travel behaviour. In practice, the findings highlight the importance of improving infrastructure, ensuring reliable schedules, and addressing accessibility gaps to encourage the use of green transportation. For policymakers, the study suggests implementing incentives such as subsidies or discounts for low-carbon travel options, which can promote sustainable behaviours and support broader environmental goals.

Several practical recommendations emerge from this study to promote the adoption of green transportation. Urban planners and transportation authorities should focus on expanding public transport networks, reducing waiting times, and increasing service frequency, particularly for KTM. Policymakers can introduce incentive programs and awareness campaigns to encourage sustainable travel, leveraging social influence through collaborations with influencers, community leaders, and educational institutions. Additionally, tourism organisations should design campaigns that align with Generation

Z’s values, environmental responsibility, and convenience, while utilising digital platforms for maximum engagement.

Despite its contributions, the study has limitations, including reliance on self-reported data, a limited sample size of 219 respondents, and a narrow focus on Generation Z tourists in Kuala Lumpur, which may limit generalizability. Furthermore, the study did not explore external barriers such as cost or infrastructure challenges. Future research could address these gaps by incorporating a broader demographic and additional influencing factors. Overall, this study provides meaningful insights into Generation Z’s travel behaviour, reinforcing the role of attitudes and social influence in green transportation adoption and offering a foundation for future research and policy development.

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ARTICLE

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# Understanding the Challenges Muslim Women Face in Adventure Tourism

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**ABSTRACT**

This study explores the challenges faced by Muslim women in adventure tourism, aiming to uncover social, cultural, and logistical barriers that limit their participation. Using a phenomenological qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine Muslim women who actively engage in adventure activities. The findings reveal that participants face several obstacles, including family-related safety concerns, discrimination, harassment, and a lack of appropriate infrastructure and privacy. Despite these challenges, the women expressed a strong desire to continue participating in such activities, highlighting the need for tourism providers to adopt gender-sensitive and culturally respectful practices. While the study is limited by its small sample size of nine and specific cultural context, it offers important insights for future research and industry practices. Practical implications include the development of inclusive services such as female-only groups, private facilities, and culturally aware staff training. This research adds original value by shedding light on an underrepresented group in tourism literature and offers actionable recommendations to enhance the travel experiences of Muslim women.

Keywords: Adventure Tourism; Muslim Women; Muslim Friendly Tourism

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The global Muslim population is expanding rapidly, projected to reach 2.3 billion by 2030, accounting for 27% of the world's population (Bahardeen et al., 2023). Within this demographic, Muslim women are emerging as a significant segment of travellers. The Mastercard-Crescent Rating Muslim Women in Travel (MWIT) 2019 report revealed that approximately 63 million Muslim women travelled in 2018, making up 45% of all Muslim travellers (Bahardeen et al., 2023). This shift reflects changing societal norms and evolving gender roles in various cultural contexts.

Historically, Muslim women's travel has been constrained by religious and cultural beliefs. However, classical Islamic scholarship, such as Ibn Hazm's al-Ihkam, presents nuanced discussions on women's right to travel. Based on verses 3:97 and 2:196 of the Qur'an, Ibn Hazm argues that women can perform Hajj without a mahram, referencing the Prophet's hadith: "Do not prevent the female servants of Allah from coming to Allah's mosques." This supports the broader notion that women can travel independently for religious and personal development purposes (Baykal, 2023; Haddad, 2019). Despite such interpretations, in some Middle Eastern countries, cultural perceptions still impose restrictions on women's mobility (Slak & Almuhrzi, 2021). Interestingly, these ideologies are increasingly challenged by movements led by Malay Muslim women (MMW), who advocate for their right to travel.

Post COVID-19, adventure tourism has grown rapidly as people seek meaningful, nature-based, and physically engaging experiences (Janowski et al., 2021). Outdoor activities have become a preferred way to maintain well-being while avoiding crowded, enclosed spaces. A report by the Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) and Switzerland Tourism highlights women's roles in adventure travel as employees, travellers, and community members, and promotes empowering women through leadership, flexible work policies, and travel products designed for women (Kelly, 2022). Tourism providers are increasingly hiring female guides, offering women-only trips, and tailoring services to suit women's preferences. Closing gender gaps requires moving beyond stereotypes and diversifying women's representation in the industry, especially in leadership roles where women can influence inclusive decision-making (Kelly, 2022).

Within this context, Muslim-friendly adventure tourism has emerged as a specialised niche. It caters to Muslim travellers seeking thrilling yet halal-compliant experiences. This includes respecting religious practices such as modesty, dietary laws, and prayer times, while offering comfortable and culturally appropriate services (Ahmed, 2023). The rise of this niche reflects the growing demand for adventure tourism that aligns with Islamic principles. However, despite the overall rise in research on Muslim travellers, gender-specific experiences, particularly those of Muslim women in adventure tourism, remain underexplored.

While adventure tourism is becoming increasingly popular among women, including Muslim women, significant barriers remain. Muslim women today are more empowered and view travel as a form of self-fulfillment and an escape from daily responsibilities. Yet, they often face challenges related to safety, religious identity, and cultural acceptance. Islamophobia further compounds these concerns, making safety a critical factor in their travel decisions (Ratthinan & Selamat, 2019).

Religious and cultural constraints also impact their participation. For instance, adherence to Sharia law and principles like amar ma'ruf nahi munkar necessitate modest behaviour and dress, often limiting options for recreational activities. A lack of women-only spaces, modest clothing for active tourism, and inclusive facilities contributes to a significant gap between interest and actual participation among Muslim women (Rehman, 2022).

Privacy and comfort are highly valued by Muslim women, especially in recreational settings. Yet, tourism services often fail to provide gender-segregated spaces or female-focused activities. A critical issue is the availability of female tour guides or instructors, which directly affects Muslim women's comfort and willingness to engage in activities. While some services offer women-only trips, they often overlook the need for same-gender staff, which is vital for creating a respectful and supportive environment (Malloy, 2024).

In addition to infrastructure gaps, societal perceptions and misinterpretations of Islamic texts further restrict Muslim women's mobility. While correct interpretations protect their travel rights, many women continue to encounter societal expectations that confine them to domestic roles. Concerns about community approval, religious obligations, and safety make the decision to travel complex. Ratthinan and Selamat (2019) argue that these social pressures can create internal conflict and anxiety, even among women aware of their Islamic rights.

Other limiting factors include financial constraints, time limitations, and a lack of awareness about travel opportunities. In some regions, gender inequality in education restricts women's exposure to tourism and travel literacy. In societies where women receive limited education, they may lack the knowledge and confidence to travel independently or participate in adventure tourism (Zadeh, 2024). In others, traditional views on gender roles discourage women from prioritising leisure or solo travel.

Despite increasing interest among Muslim women in adventure tourism, they continue to face religious, social, structural, and perceptual barriers. These obstacles highlight the urgent need for more inclusive tourism practices that address gender specific concerns. Tourism providers and policymakers must collaborate to create safer, more respectful, and culturally appropriate travel opportunities for Muslim women. Accordingly, the primary objective of this study is to investigate the challenges Muslim women face in adventure tourism, with particular emphasis on identifying the social, cultural, and logistical barriers that restrict their participation

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Both Muslim women travellers and women travellers in general encountered various constraints that significantly shape their travel experiences. While the nature of these constraints may vary due to cultural or religious considerations, the challenges faced by these two groups often overlap. The integration of findings from Tavakoli and Mura (2021), Abdul Shukor and Kattiyapornpong (2024), and Doran (2016) showed several factors that become barriers or constraints for Muslim women to join or enjoy adventure activities. One of them is the socio-cultural factors, such as traditional gender roles and societal expectations. This factor often limits their independence in making travel decisions, with some cultures or religions requiring male guardian approval. Upon returning from trips, women may also face cultural scrutiny or judgment, particularly if their travel choices deviate from societal norms. Religious restrictions further constrain their options, as adherence to Islamic principles necessitates access to halal food, prayer facilities, and accommodations that respect modesty and other faith-based requirements.

Destinations that lack these aspects present significant barriers to participation in adventure travel. Band (2024) mentioned that safety concerns are another critical constraint, as fears of harassment and limited availability of women-only facilities or secure accommodations discourage independent travel. Practical limitations, including financial constraints and the challenge of accessing reliable information about Muslim-friendly services, further complicate travel planning. Additionally, internal psychological barriers, such as feelings of guilt or hesitation due to familial and cultural expectations, often deter Muslim women from pursuing travel opportunities (Tavakoli & Mura, 2021; Abdul Shukor & Kattiyapornpong, 2024; Doran, 2016).

A study from Brugulat and Coromina (2021) titled “Constraints of Solo Female Backpackers in Southeast Asia” identified several constraints faced by women during their adventure travels. While this research primarily focuses on women in general, the constraints discussed were also relevant to Muslim women travellers who experience similar challenges in adventure tourism. These constraints can be grouped into four categories, which are sociocultural, personal, practical, and spatial constraints. Sociocultural constraints are rooted in societal expectations and cultural norms that could limit women’s freedom and make them more vulnerable to harassment and discrimination. For example, in some cultures, women traveling alone might be frowned upon or seen as inappropriate, which can lead to judgmental attitudes or even bitterness from local communities. Personal constraint refers to individual beliefs, fears, and self-efficacy. These include concerns like fear of getting lost, facing violence, or being unable to cope with unexpected situations. Such fears can significantly impact a woman's confidence and willingness to engage in adventure activities, especially when travelling solo. Practical constraints involve issues related to travel logistics, such as transportation, affordable yet secure accommodations, or managing travel budgets.

These practical concerns are often more pronounced for women, as they may need to take extra precautions to ensure their safety. Spatial constraints are related to the physical and geographical aspects of travel. Certain areas may be less accessible or safe for solo female travellers due to factors like difficult terrain, poor infrastructure, or high crime rates. Women may need to carefully plan their routes and destinations to avoid potentially dangerous locations (Brugulat & Coromina, 2021). Additionally, Haddad (2019) and Gewinner (2021), both examine the influence of cultural backgrounds on the travel behaviour of Muslim women. Gewinner (2021) highlights how societal expectations and cultural norms often restrict Muslim women's freedom, exposing them to judgment and discrimination. Similarly, Haddad (2019) emphasises the significant role that sociocultural and religious factors play in shaping their travel experiences. Both studies underscore the need to overcome these constraints to encourage greater participation of Muslim women in tourism activities. They also highlight the importance of addressing stereotypes to enhance their overall travel experiences (Hadad, 2019; Gewinner, 2021). In summary, this research highlights the various constraints faced by women in adventure tourism, which are equally important to Muslim women travellers. Understanding these constraints can help in developing targeted strategies to support and empower all women who wish to embark on adventurous journeys.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a phenomenological qualitative research design to gain a deep understanding of Muslim women's needs and challenges in adventure tourism. Phenomenology is well-suited for exploring lived experiences and individual perceptions (Delve et al., 2022). A qualitative approach allows for flexibility and depth, capturing the personal and contextual dimensions of participants' experiences. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the primary data collection method, as they encourage open dialogue and rich insights that structured surveys might miss. Research questions and study objectives were developed based on a thorough literature review and served as a guide in designing the interview protocol. Themes such as access, communication, services, environment, and social perceptions were explored to align with the study's aim.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique aimed at selecting information-rich cases that provide an in-depth understanding relevant to the research question. The sample targeted Muslim women who had actively participated in adventure tourism, with inclusion criteria including age above 18, self-identification as Muslim, and experience in at least one adventure tourism activity within the past two years to ensure relevance and recency of experiences. A sample size of 5 to 10 was determined based on the principle of data saturation, where additional interviews no longer yield new insights (Rahimi et al., 2024). Literature suggests that 5–10 interviews are sufficient in studies with homogenous populations to achieve thematic saturation (Malterud et al., 2016; Hennink & Kaiser, 2020). Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they understood the study's objectives and ethical considerations, such as confidentiality and voluntary participation. The interviews, guided by open-ended questions adapted from Bahardeen et al. (2023), Tavakoli and Mura (2021), Abdul Shukor and Kattiyapornpong (2024), and Doran (2016), were recorded, transcribed, and analysed. A pre-test involving one academic and one experienced adventurer confirmed the relevance and clarity of the interview questions.

Data from the interviews were analysed using thematic analysis, which complements the phenomenological approach by systematically identifying patterns and themes within participants' lived experiences, enabling the researcher to interpret and describe the essence of those experiences. This approach involves six stages: familiarization with data, initial coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming them, and writing up the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Crosly, 2021). The researcher engaged in reflective practices and bracketing to reduce personal bias, ensuring the participants' perspectives remained central. Themes were identified across domains such as travel access, modesty-related services, communication, safety, environmental compatibility, and societal pressures. This structured analysis allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the unique challenges faced by Muslim women in adventure tourism.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A total of nine respondents participated in the study, and all of them shared several common characteristics are presented in Tables 1 and 2. Specifically, the respondents were Muslim women in the age range of 20 to 23 years old who wore the hijab and observed their daily prayer. The respondents showed varying levels of adventure experience. The majority were categorized as having intermediate-level experience, while three respondents were identified as having advanced-level experience. Furthermore, all respondents had participated in adventure activities within Malaysia, while only one respondent had engaged in international adventure activities, specifically in Japan. Below is the table of respondents' demographic profile and the indicators for the code used by the author for each respondent:

Table 1. The indicator of the code used for the respondents

| **Aspect** | **Codes** |
|---|---|
| Gender | F (females)<br>M (males) |
| Adventure Experience Level | Beginner (B) – New to adventure tourism<br>Intermediate (I) – Moderate experience<br>Advanced (A) – Highly experienced |
| Location/ Context | Domestic tourist (D) – Participates locally<br>International tourist (I) – Participate abroad |

Table 2. The demographic of the respondents

| **Code** | **Gender** | **Age** | **Experience Level** | **Location** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| F-A-D-1 | Female | 22 | Advanced | Domestic |
| F-I-D-2 | Female | 20 | Intermediate | Domestic |
| F-I-D-3 | Female | 21 | Intermediate | Domestic |
| F-I-D-4 | Female | 22 | Intermediate | Domestic |
| F-I-D-5 | Female | 23 | Intermediate | Domestic |
| F-A-D-6 | Female | 22 | Advanced | Domestic |
| F-I-D-7 | Female | 21 | Intermediate | Domestic |
| F-A-I-8 | Female | 22 | Advanced | International |
| F-I-D-9 | Female | 22 | Intermediate | Domestic |

Despite the growing enthusiasm of Muslim women for adventure tourism, they continue to face several significant challenges that hinder their participation. One major barrier is family concerns about safety, especially for solo travellers or those in all-female groups. As Respondent F-I-D-2 noted, “My family worries about safety, especially for solo or all-female group travel” (see Table 3, Theme CW1). This aligns with findings from Ratthinan and Selamat (2019), who highlight safety concerns as a primary factor limiting Muslim women’s travel autonomy. Discrimination and Islamophobia also pose significant obstacles. Respondent F-A-I-8 shared, “I experienced Islamophobia abroad when the operator was racist toward me” (Table 3, Theme CW2), echoing the experiences documented by Tavakoli and Mura (2021), who report that Islamophobic attitudes in tourism settings negatively impact Muslim women travellers’ comfort and willingness to participate. Overcoming stereotypes about Muslim women in adventure tourism remains a persistent challenge. Respondent F-A-D-6 explained, “If I am being judged, that is the challenge I need to go through to enjoy what I love” (Table 3, Theme CW3), which resonates with Ahmed’s (2023) discussion on the societal expectations and prejudices Muslim women must navigate in leisure spaces. Logistical barriers, such as connectivity challenges, also impact their experience. For instance, Respondent F-A-D-1 remarked, “When we reached the deeper part of that area, we had difficulties accessing the GPS because of weak connectivity. We got lost for a bit” (Table 3, Theme AC2). Such infrastructural limitations have been noted as common obstacles in remote adventure tourism destinations (Janowski et al., 2021).

Harassment, particularly catcalling, adds another layer of discomfort and safety concern. Respondent F-A-I-8 reported, “I experienced catcalling and felt unsafe and uncomfortable” (Table 3, Theme SS2), consistent with Kelly’s (2022) findings on gendered harassment in outdoor and adventure settings. Mixed-gender environments also create discomfort, particularly during activities requiring physical proximity. Respondent F-A-D-1 shared, “During parasailing, the seating was mixed with men, and I was uncomfortable sitting beside a man in my wet shirt” (Table 3, Theme RC4). This supports previous research highlighting the importance of gender-sensitive arrangements in adventure tourism (Ramli, 2023). Privacy concerns in changing areas further complicate participation. As Respondent F-I-D-6 remarked, “Changing areas are often lacking, which makes me uncomfortable” (Table 3, Theme SA2), echoing Tavakoli and Mura’s (2021) emphasis on the need for gender-segregated facilities. Finally, logistical issues such as difficulties with vehicle rentals can disrupt travel plans and cause stress. Respondent F-I-D-9 recounted, “I have experienced difficulties when renting a vehicle; my friend was scammed by the owner, which affected our schedule” (Table 3, Theme AC4). Such challenges highlight the broader infrastructural gaps affecting Muslim women’s adventure travel (Ramli, 2023).

Overall, these findings reveal the multifaceted challenges Muslim women face in adventure tourism, spanning social, cultural, and logistical domains. Addressing these barriers is crucial for tourism providers aiming to create safer, more inclusive, and culturally respectful environments that support Muslim women's participation.

Table 3. Table of thematic analysis for the challenges as Muslim women themes in adventure tourism

| **Category** | **Theme Code** | **Theme Description** | **Illustrative example** |
|---|---|---|---|
| CW (Challenges as Muslim Women) | CW1 | Family concerns about safety | *"My family worries about safety, especially for solo or all-female group travel"* |
| | CW2 | Islamophobia/ discrimination | *"I experienced Islamophobia abroad when the operator was racist toward me"* |
| | CW3 | Overcoming stereotypes | *"If I am being judged, that is the challenge I need to go through to enjoy what I love"* |
| | AC2 | Connectivity challenges | *"When we reached the deeper part of that area, we had difficulties accessing the GPS because of weak connectivity. We got lost for a bit"* |
| | SS2 | Harassment concerns | *"I experienced catcalling and felt unsafe and uncomfortable"* |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | RC4 | Mixed-gender environment concerns | *"During parasailing, the seating was mixed with men, and I was uncomfortable sitting beside a man in my wet shirt"* |
| | SA2 | Privacy in changing areas | *"Changing areas often lacking, which makes me uncomfortable"* |
| | AC4 | Issues with rental vehicles | *"I have experienced difficulties when renting a vehicle; my friend was scammed by the owner, which affected our schedule"* (AC4) |

## 5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study set out to explore the unique challenges faced by Muslim women in adventure tourism, a growing segment of global travel. As the Muslim population continues to rise, Muslim women are becoming increasingly visible in the tourism landscape, especially in adventure travel. However, their participation remains shaped by a complex interplay of religious obligations, cultural norms, and structural limitations. While Islamic teachings, when correctly interpreted, allow women to travel independently, societal attitudes and misinterpretations still act as significant barriers. Findings from both the literature review and primary interviews affirm that Muslim women often face issues related to safety, modesty, discrimination, infrastructure, and social acceptance, all of which can limit their freedom to engage in adventurous travel experiences. The voices of the respondents in this study provide firsthand insight into the lived realities of Muslim women travellers. Safety concerns, especially in solo or women-only travel, emerged as a consistent theme, alongside discomfort in mixed-gender environments and a lack of privacy in facilities. Challenges such as harassment, Islamophobia, and unreliable local services further restrict participation. Family and societal pressures also contribute to internal conflicts, forcing many Muslim women to balance personal aspirations with community expectations. Despite these obstacles, the participants demonstrated resilience, determination, and a clear desire to pursue travel experiences that align with their values.

In conclusion, there is a clear need for more inclusive, respectful, and culturally sensitive tourism practices that consider the specific needs of Muslim women. Adventure tourism providers and policymakers must take proactive steps to create safer environments, provide women-only spaces and services, and challenge stereotypes through education and representation. By doing so, the industry can not only empower Muslim women to travel more freely but also enrich the adventure tourism sector with greater diversity, inclusivity, and global relevance. However, this study is limited by its small sample size and specific cultural context, which may affect the generalizability of findings. Future research should include larger, more diverse samples and mixed methods to deepen understanding. Implementing culturally sensitive staff training, women-only facilities, and community engagement are practical recommendations to enhance Muslim women's participation and experiences in adventure tourism.

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ARTICLE

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# Who Are Malaysia's Bicycle Tourists? An Exploratory Analysis of Their Key Features

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## ABSTRACT

This paper dives into the new phenomenon of bicycle tourism in Malaysia by outlining the major demographic and behavioural characteristics of bike tourists. This study is a response to the increased popularity of cycling (which seems to be going even higher due to the COVID-19 pandemic) and fills the gap in empirical evidence regarding the cycling tourism market in Malaysia. A quantitative research method with a snowball sampling technique was used, providing online survey information to 206 active bicycle riders who were surveyed online through the Malaysia Cycling Community. Results indicate that the Malaysian bicycle tourists are overwhelmingly young adult males, well educated, and aged between 18 and 27 years. The majority upbike on recreational road rides once per week (mainly with friends) and like short trips that are not overnight. Their spending habits should be indicative of the idea that they seek value products when it comes to cycling. The insights can provide useful recommendations to tourism planners, policymakers, and local businesses in the effort to optimize infrastructure, stimulate sustainable tourism attractions, and tailor services to the special needs of the swelling demographic. The paper is relevant to the academic literature on niche tourism as well as to the informed development of the bicycle tourism industry in Malaysia.

Keywords: Bicycle Tourism; Cycling Motivation; Niche Tourism; Recreational Cycling; Sustainable Tourism; Travel Behaviour

Article Classification: Research Paper

## 1. INTRODUCTION

There is a long history of bicycles as a means of transportation. A cultural product of the past that became one of the main means of transport, the bicycle turned into a recreational, tourist, and leisure product. Although the transportation sector has been highly monopolised by motorised vehicles, it has not been void of the bicycle, especially as a source of body exercise and travel experience. Cycling has become part of a lifestyle as well as an enjoyable hobby in the 21st century and is backed by a lot of research, which has indicated its health benefits and advantages to society (Sharma & Nag, 2025). Sharma and Nag's (2025) bibliometric analysis indicates that Italy ranks first in the number of documents produced between 1982 and 2024, with 12 publications in articles that were retrieved out of 134.

The bicycling trend has been experiencing a significant increase in Malaysia. Several recent Malaysian works have examined the recreational cycling characteristics (Aizat et al., 2025), the motives of the e-bike sharing services (Ahmad & Harun, 2024), and the possible community-based tourism (Arissuta & Kholis, 2024), to mention some. As Lian et al. (2014) note, the number of registered cyclists was 15,335 in the country as of 2011. Despite the scarcity of the latest statistics, Loh (2021) found that Malaysia was in second place in Asia in 2020 as the largest bicycle market, which suggests an increased popularity among Malaysians of cycling-related activities. Bicycle tourism has also been growing as a niche in Malaysian tourism due to this trend. In the 2011-2014 period, 95 travel agencies in collaboration with Tourism Malaysia were used to introduce 202 cycling tourism packages around the nation in order to exploit the costs and benefits of increasing growth in the trend (Tourism Malaysia, 2015; Rahman et al., 2023).

The Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic affected world travel and tourism in 2020, but strikingly led to a rise in bicycle tourism. The restrictions and limitations reduced the possibility of organising large group activities, which is why the Malaysians could enjoy a secure and single mode of outdoor entertainment through cycling. Cycling also became an escape and therapeutic way of exercising, a tool of local exploration, and a sport to many (Aziz & Lim, 2022; Wong & Tan, 2021). In contrast, OsOch and Steingrube (2024) emphasised that the phenomenon of bike tourism in Poland was hugely demanded by the youngest.

The bicycle was initially invented as a means of transport, but it has since adapted to play other roles other than being a mode of transport. Biking as a leisure and tourism activity has received huge attention in the last few years. Xu et al. (2019) assert that the importance of cycling in recreational activities has been examined by a number of studies in the context of its increased popularity all over the globe. Being an alternative type of tourism, bicycle tourism has proven to have significant advantages, which include local economic growth, fewer effects on the environment, and more investment in tourism infrastructure. Furthermore, a recent study by Smith and Johnson (2023) refers to the increased role of bicycle tourism in encouraging community involvement and the creation of a healthy travelling pattern.

Such activities vary depending on the use of bicycles, as they could be used in leisure riding, competitive sports, and travel tourism. Under this, cycling is considered an efficient and environmentally friendly form of travel within the tourism sector, which enables tourists to have a closer interaction with the local communities and environments. It is very much in tandem with worldwide initiatives to enhance sustainability and responsible tourism. Indeed, riding is relevant to some of the goals of Sustainable Development issued by the United Nations (SDGs), particularly the objectives of health, environment, economic development, and sustainable cities. According to the United Nations (2020), cycling also has a significant contribution in supporting the achievement of at least 10 of the 17 SDGs, thus being a useful part of the international sustainable development projects before the year 2030.

Bicycle tourism is recognised as part of the country's niche tourism in the case of Malaysia. In Malaysia, the concept of cycling is being increasingly embraced by both urban and rural folks due to the development of ownership of bicycles, coupled with an increase in the number of people taking part in cycling activities, as well as bicycle rides. Even as early as 2011, the number of registered cyclists was already impressive, and since then, the interest in cycling has grown wider throughout the years. Having identified this trend, Tourism Malaysia (2015) has started to create more than 200 bicycle packages in partnership with other local travel agencies, and it can be stated conclusively that this segment of the tourism market has been in the sights of the organisation.

As of now, with the increasing importance of bike tourism in global and national perspectives, there is a necessity to know more about people who pursue bike tourism. Nevertheless, as much as it has the potential, there is little empirical work that has been done in the context of Malaysia to profile the demographic, behavioural, and motivational issues of bicycle tourists. The identification of the type of tourists and their motivation to participate in cycling activities is critical in formulating specific tourism and infrastructure development, as well as in marketing.

However, bicycle tourism has been a major concern in recent years and is no exception in Malaysia in the tourism industry. Bicycle tourism is any travelling that incorporates cycling into the travel experience, commonly outside the local neighbourhoods and into new areas (García & Müller, 2022). As the popularity of cycling as a recreation and tourism activity has been experienced internationally, there has been a subsequent spillover to Malaysia, where the activity of cycling has gained popularity, particularly during the COVID-19 period in Malaysia. The need to avoid contact with others, plus the restriction of movement and size of groups, prompted many Malaysians to choose cycling as one of the safe, individual, and therapeutic methods to exercise outside (Aziz & Lim, 2022; Wong & Tan, 2021).

This trend has statistical backup. The United Nations Comtrade (2021) reveals that the amount of bicycles that were imported in Malaysia in 2019 was almost 50 million dollars, and this is something that shows an emerging interest of the consumer in bicycle ownership and usage. In acknowledging this change, Tourism Malaysia has reported bicycle tourism as an officially selected niche tourism product and one that has the potential to infuse economies in the region with cycling activities and travel packages (Rahman et al., 2023; Tourism Malaysia, 2015).

Through these developments, there is still no empirical study on the nature of bicycle tourists in Malaysia. Knowledge of the profile of these tourists, their demographics, travelling trends, motivations, preferences, and behaviours is what is required to have efficient tourism planning and design of products and market segmentation. According to Sheng (2015), it is essential to understand the motivations and characteristics of tourists because they are the keystone to their target market identification and development of tourism offerings. In the absence of such an understanding, promotion of and expansion of the bicycle tourism industry could be misguided and would not live up to the expectations of prospective sector players.

Moreover, previous studies conducted in Malaysia have concentrated on motivational factors to a limited extent by neglecting a larger comprehension of the traits of tourists, such as age, gender, income level, experience of cycling, the purpose of travel, and preferences. As was pointed out by Nazarudin et al. (2020), people have different motives to spend time cycling, and such motives are usually determined by various personal, social, and environmental reasons. In this way, there is a need to conduct a full profiling of bicycle tourists to assist tourism stakeholders in tailoring their experience, boost destination attractiveness, and establish long-term sustainable tourism approaches (Nazarudin et al., 2020; Lim & Cheah, 2023).

Hence, this research paper attempts to fill this gap as it determines the key defining attributes of bicycle tourists in Malaysia and contributes to areas of research and practical applications in the burgeoning tourism market in Malaysia. This research study aims to determine the nature of bicycle tourists. In that regard, the research question will be, what are the drivers of bicycle tourists in Malaysia? The aim thereafter is to determine the core features of bicycle tourists in Malaysia.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Bicycle Tourism

The scope of bicycle tourism is very broad with regard to all the activities associated with travel, which have been the core ingredient as far as the bicycle is concerned for tourism. Depending on the sources, there are many different definitions of literature, with most focusing on two- and three-dimensional components. According to Yeh et al. (2019), bicycle tourism could be characterised as travelling involving the observation of or attending a cycling event or the actual engagement in a solo or organised cycle tour. In the meantime, Garcia and Muller (2022) expressed a broader understanding of adventure cycling as any kind of ride with the help of a bicycle that is pursued with pleasure.

These different definitions remind us of the wide definition of bicycle tourism, as it may comprise pleasure riding, racing, arduous pedalling, cross-country travel, mountain biking, and even exploration of the countryside or city. Irrespective of the mentioned activity, the point is that all of these activities are united by one aspect: cycling is just a part of the general tourism experience, either being a core reason to travel to the place or a side adventure on a trip (Lim & Cheah, 2023).

Traditionally, bikes became a favourite means of transport and recreation all over the world in the 1890s, only to remain relevant till the 1920s (Soyalp, 2018). Motorised transport of all kinds caused bicycles to decline, especially among the higher-income bracket. Nevertheless, after the petrol crisis in the world, bicycles started to regain serious significance as a mode of transport. During the 1980s, bicycles were starting to take the form of a tourism industry, which at the time was viewed as an activity that low- to middle-income people could participate in until the research of special interest tourism changed the perception (Garcia & Muller, 2022; Soyalp, 2018).

Technically, Sarol and Cimen (2017) characterise bicycle tourism as an equal number of 40-kilometre cycling trips taken outside of home and an overnight stay, or the 50-kilometre cycling round trip and four-hour trip away, and at least a 50-kilometre trip (without cycling) and four hours away. These trips involve an active or passive participation in the area of cycling as vacation/leisure/recreation/sports/competition (attendance at commercial or charity/festivals/challenges) and a self-organised cycle tour (Sarol & Cimen, 2017). Another development that gave form to sustainable tourism in Italy is bicycle tourism (Maggi et al., 2021).

Bicycle tourism is environmentally friendly and sustainable in nature, which provides the possibility to visit the places that are not exposed to mass tourism; hence, it allows tourists to feel close to nature (Bakogiannis et al., 2020). The high level of its popularity can be observed in the segment that takes its place in the tourism market (Yeh et al., 2019). However, cycling has been viewed as a sustainable mode of transport system, and it is encouraged by cities to enhance the quality of life, health, wellness, and environmental protection (Mosko et al., 2019). Although infrastructure development remains a necessity, having insights about the behaviour and needs of cyclists is of paramount importance so as to have a thriving and sustainable growth of tourism (Khaironi et al., 2024). Bike tourists, therefore, are the key players in shaping the bicycle tourism industry.

Being a niche form of tourism, bicycle tourism falls in line with sustainable travel, active life, and authentic interaction with local settings and environments. It appeals to a wide audience of people with different age groups, genders, incentives, cycling knowledge, and interests (Nazarudin et al., 2020; Thompson & Garcia, 2022). To facilitate the successful development and marketing of this industry, it is important to know the characteristics and needs of bicycle tourists (Rahman et al., 2023; Sheng, 2015).

This survey is aimed at determining the key profile of bicycle tourists in Malaysia, where limited research has been conducted, which is essential in the efforts of various stakeholders to create such products, improve services, and contribute to bicycle tourism proliferation with the objective of sustainability.

### 2.2 Bicycle Tourist

This study focuses on the figure of the bicycle tourist since the latter cannot be imagined without the active involvement of individuals who motivate the involvement of bicycle tourism. The mode of expressing personal trips, bike touring, has grown more common in the world; thus, the number of people who refer to themselves as bicycle tourists has increased. To develop, market, and sustainably offer this niche tourism sector appropriately, it is important to know who those tourists are (Garc, 2022; Lim & Cheah, 2023).

Lamont (2015) noted that a bicycle tourist is an individual who engages in an activity or watches any activity concerned with cycling that either involves a one-day trip by the bicycle tourist or overnight stays. The definition contains a variety in the group, as it might consist of casual leisure cyclists, competitive participants, long-distance cycle tourers, and spectators of an event. Despite the presence of a certain activity, the common feature of this group is the involvement of cycling in the travelling experience to pursue recreation, competition, or exploration of the purpose (Yeh et al., 2019).

Bicycle tourists differ in demographic features, experience in the field of cycling, motivation, travelling habits, and preferences in destination and tourist behaviour (Nazarudin et al., 2020; Thompson & Garcia, 2022). Some will cycle to have fun and be fit; others will travel to have adventures/explore nature and cultures, as well as promote environmental sustainability. Such variations necessitate the need to segment and profile the nature of bicycle tourists to be able to comprehend their needs and expectations.

According to this study, the bicycle tourist is a narrower version of the bicycle tourist in the sense that the bicycle tourist in this particular study indicates people who use bicycles to travel locally in and around Malaysia. It is expected that by outlining their key peculiarities, this research will become a part of the existing body of knowledge on cycle tourism and help tourism stakeholders adopt more specific and inclusive tourism strategies (Rahman et al., 2023).

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quantitative research design to examine the demographics, travel behaviours, and preferences of bicycle tourists in Malaysia. According to Bhandari (2020), quantitative research involves the collection and statistical analysis of numerical data, while Apuke (2017) highlights its utility in measuring variables and identifying patterns across larger populations. The primary data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire administered through Google Forms, a widely accessible and cost-effective online survey tool. Such web-based platforms allow researchers to reach participants efficiently, even within limited budgets, and to compile statistical data in a relatively short timeframe (Vasantha & Harinarayana, 2016). The questionnaire comprised two major sections. The first section focused on respondents' demographic profiles, including gender, age, education level, employment status, and spending patterns. The second section explored their cycling background and experiences, with questions addressing the nature and frequency of cycling trips, whether conducted individually or in groups, and respondents' personal reflections on their cycling practices.

A snowball sampling technique was employed, in which existing respondents referred to other potential participants who met the study's inclusion criteria (Gagnon & Barber, 2018). This method was particularly effective given the difficulty of directly accessing the niche population of bicycle tourists. Initial participants were recruited from the Malaysia Cycling Community, a popular Facebook group with a diverse membership of casual, regular, and competitive cyclists who actively engage in bicycle tourism activities. To qualify, respondents had to be actively involved in cycling in Malaysia, whether for leisure, organized events, or travel purposes. The snowball approach ensured that the study reached a credible and relevant sample of bicycle tourists. As there is currently no national registration or monitoring system for cyclists in

Malaysia, the Malaysian Cycling Community was adopted as a practical proxy for the population of bicycle tourists. This group reflects the diversity of cycling activities, making it a suitable platform for sampling. To determine an appropriate sample size, the study applied the sample-to-item ratio suggested by Gorsuch (1983), which requires at least five respondents per questionnaire item. With 36 items in the instrument, a minimum of 180 respondents were targeted to achieve statistical reliability. The data collected was processed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive analysis was applied to summarize demographic characteristics, while inferential analysis allowed the identification of behavioural patterns and relationships among variables relevant to bicycle tourism.

## 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This study collected data using an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The questionnaire link was shared within the Malaysia Cycling Community Facebook group, allowing active cyclists to voluntarily participate. The study used a cross-sectional survey design, collecting data at a single point in time. As noted by Cherry (2019), cross-sectional studies are effective for examining relationships among variables and providing snapshots of current trends. The questionnaires applied in the study will be distributed via a Facebook cycling club called Malaysia Cycling Community. The researcher got a total of 206 in a period of seven weeks. The questionnaire has been circulated among 206 bicyclists; hence, this research was able to achieve a 114% response rate.

The response rate has amounted to greater than 100 per cent because the research was conducted using the snowball sampling technique in gathering the data. The participants have an opportunity to respond to the research as long as the survey link in Google Forms is open. The researcher ceased to receive replies in week seven, and a total of 206 responses had been received that surpassed the number of recommended respondents by Gorsuch (1983). Nonetheless, Cleave (2020) indicated that over 50% in the response rate is considered great in most instances. This indicates that these participants have high levels of motivation to partake in this study.

Table 1 indicates the demographic profile of the respondents, which incorporates gender, age, highest level of education, current condition of employment, and the willingness of the respondents to spend on buying a bicycle. As indicated by the table, male respondents accounted for 66.5% (N=137), which was the highest as compared to female respondents, who formed 33.5% (N=69) of the entire study. In the meantime, concerning the age, the highest age group participating in this study is the 18-27 group, contributing 37.9% (N=78), and the lowest age group, which is 58 and above, takes 3.4% (N=7). Thereafter, in the table, the results of the level of education of the respondents are also given. Using the table, one can conclude that the highest level of respondent compound corresponds to 41.3% (N=85) of STPM or Diploma, and only 0.5% (N=1) possess a PhD. Regarding the employment status, 72.3% (N=148) of respondents are considered employed, making this population the majority, and contrasted with 1.5% (N=3) of respondents who are not working. Finally, the final question would find out whether the respondents were willing to spend it on purchasing a bicycle. According to the table, 36.9% (N=76) of them will be able to buy a bicycle at a price of less than RM1,000. In the meantime, 1.9% (N=4) of the respondents will pay RM 7,001-RM 10,000 to acquire a bicycle.

Table 1. Demographic profile

| Item | Category | Frequency (N) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 137 | 66.5 |
| | Female | 69 | 33.5 |
| Age Group | 18–27 | 78 | 37.9 |
| | 28–37 | 60 | 29.1 |
| | 38–47 | 48 | 23.3 |
| | 48–57 | 13 | 6.3 |
| | 58 and above | 7 | 3.4 |
| Education Level | SPM | 35 | 17.0 |
| | STPM/Diploma | 85 | 41.3 |
| | Bachelor's Degree | 80 | 38.8 |
| | Master's Degree | 5 | 2.4 |
| | PhD | 1 | 0.5 |
| Employment Status | Employed | 148 | 72.3 |
| | Student | 44 | 21.4 |
| | Part-time | 5 | 2.4 |
| | Retired | 5 | 2.4 |
| | Unemployed | 3 | 1.5 |
| Spending Willingness | Below RM1,000 | 76 | 36.9 |
| | RM1,001 – RM3,000 | 66 | 32.0 |
| | RM3,001 – RM5,000 | 39 | 18.9 |
| | RM5,001 – RM7,000 | 16 | 7.8 |
| | RM7,001 – RM10,000 | 4 | 1.9 |
| | RM10,001 and above | 5 | 2.4 |

As indicated by Table 2, the results demonstrate the background of the cycling trip, which involves questions regarding the cycling programme, the type of cycling one had, the participant who took the cycling part, and the type of accommodation they utilised when visiting. Based on the table, most of the respondents 48.1%, N=99) cycled once a week, which constituted 48.1% (N=99) of the respondents, and 3.4% of the respondents (N=7) cycled five days a week. In the meantime, for one type of cycling, the greatest proportion among the respondents, 47.6% (N = 98), cycled on the road, whereas the lowest category, 15.0% (N = 31), went for the mountain biking type. This is followed by the findings on the primary cycling partner of the respondents, which are also reflected in the table. In reference to the table, it is understandable that the largest category of respondents produced a result of 44.2% (N=91) who answered to go cycling with a friend, or 1.0% (N=2) wrote under the name of "other" but did not specify who exactly. Finally, the final question concerning the accommodation—hence the response—indicated that the proportion of the respondents not visiting the cycling trip overnight was 54.4% (N=112) and the proportion choosing a motel as the accommodation of the cycling trip was 4.4% (N=9).

Table 2. Background of the Cycling Trip

| Item | Category | Frequency (N) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Cycling Schedule | One day/week | 99 | 48.1 |
| | Two days/week | 48 | 23.3 |
| | Three days/week | 34 | 16.5 |
| | Four days/week | 9 | 4.4 |
| | Five days/week | 7 | 3.4 |
| | More than five days/week | 9 | 4.4 |
| Type of Cycling | On-road | 98 | 47.6 |
| | Off-road (Mountain biking) | 31 | 15.0 |
| | Both | 77 | 37.4 |
| Cycling Partner | Friend | 91 | 44.2 |
| | Family | 48 | 23.3 |
| | Solo | 47 | 22.8 |
| | Cycling club | 18 | 8.7 |
| | Others | 2 | 1.0 |
| | Not applicable (day trip only) | 112 | 54.4 |
| Accommodation | Private home (friends/relatives) | 29 | 14.1 |
| | Rented house | 21 | 10.2 |
| | Campgrounds | 18 | 8.7 |
| | Hotel | 17 | 8.3 |
| | Motel | 9 | 4.4 |

## 5. DISCUSSIONS AND FINDINGS

Based on the survey results, the nature of bicycle tourists in Malaysia exhibits some principal demographic and behavioural patterns that make it possible to realize the objective of identifying them and the ways in which they engage in the activities relating to cycling. On its demographic aspects, the data reveals the fact that bicycle tourism is arguably an active type of tourism in Malaysia that is largely dominated by the young adult population, especially those in the ages of 18 to 27 years (37.9%). Backed up by the previous research of Osóch and Steingrube (2024), this trend involving younger people may be explained by their higher physical abilities, energy, adaptability, and willingness to indulge in adventure, as the young have a tendency to have. Participation with older adults (58+) was, by contrast, minimal (3.4%), probably due to the amount of physical activity required to ride a bicycle and the varying recreational habits of older adults, as opposed to younger adults.

In gender analysis, the number of respondents (66.5%) who were male was high, and the proportion of the female respondents (33.5%) was also wide. This 2:1 proportion holds in tandem with worldwide trends that indicate a larger male population in road as well as mountain biking (Yeh et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the fact that women also participate in bicycle tourism greatly indicates that bicycle tourism in Malaysia is attached to inclusiveness regardless of gender. The activity is free, self-sufficient, and healthy in terms of lifestyle, which is why the offered activity attracts a large number of participants irrespective of their gender identification.

The bicycle tourists' educational background was also multifaceted, with most of the individuals having an STPM/Diploma (41.3%) or a bachelor's degree (38.8%). This implies that bicycle tourism is specific to highly educated people, probably because many of them are more aware of the disciplines regarding environmental sustainability, health awareness, and lifestyle, focusing on the advantages of cycling. Such results concur with the position offered by a study of past research that an elevated level of education is usually recognised to be related to an increase in eco-friendly and wellness practices (Lois-Gonzalez et al., 2020).

With respect to employment status, 72.3% are employed, indicating that the vast majority of bicycle tourists are working individuals who perceive cycling as not only an active tourism activity but also a recreational activity, usually done during weekends or holidays. Also, they were price-sensitive, as 36.9% declared that the lowest budget for a bike purchase was less than RM1000. Though in certain responses it was noted that biking is a costly sport, these findings revealed that there are cost-effective alternatives and accessibility for different people based on their personal preferences and budget limitations. To most people, low-priced bikes that do not compromise on durability and functionality are just enough to facilitate their cycling activities in relation to tourism.

The study on the cycling behaviour of respondents also adds to the profile of the Malaysian bicycle tourists. Most of the subjects claimed to exercise by riding a bike once a week (48.1%), and this indicates cycling as an activity and pastime, not an everyday routine. Few participated in high-frequency cycling (five days or more a week, 7.8%), so the committed or performance-based cyclists are a minority within the overarching bicycle tourism population.

Regarding the type of cycling, on-road cycling was preferred by almost forty-eight percent of the people (47.6), and a total of forty percent of the respondents engaged in road cycling and off-road activities. Riding a mountain bike on its own was less popular (15.0%), perhaps because of incomplete access to the terrain, specialist equipment requirements, or increased skill requirements. This evidence gives an indication that the majority of bicycle tourists like to cycle in an urban or defined cycling environment that is easier to access and facilitated by the infrastructure.

The companionship in cycling was not homogeneous, with friends making the largest size (44.2%), followed by the family members (23.3%) and the individual riders (22.8%). This is indicative of the social aspect of bike tourism, whereby group activities increase the recreational experience. Also, 8.7% of respondents rode in cycling clubs, thus implying that there are organised groups of cyclists that facilitate the development of this niche in tourism.

Finally, the accommodation use results revealed that 54.4% of the respondents did not spend a night, which prospectively indicates that not all cycling tours are long durations, and they are rather considered as day trips. It is an indication of one possible growth area because multi-day bicycle touring is relatively underdeveloped in Malaysia. Most of the overnight stays consisted of people preferring to stay in a private home or rented house, which implies the significance of affordable and informal options of accommodation to domestic bicycle tourists.

The results of this study indicate that bicycle tourists of Malaysia are predominantly young, male, highly educated, and prefer short journeys and recreational riding with friends on a low-cost budget. Such demographics and behaviour of respondents correlate with other studies, underlining the variety of motivations and profiles of bicycle tourists (Nazarudin et al., 2020). In addition, the tendency towards convenient cycling experiences favours the initiatives of Tourism Malaysia to base their cycle-related packages and renovations according to the priorities of these tourists (Tourism Malaysia, 2015). This work relates the findings to what is known regarding extant literature and industry initiatives to offer action-oriented reports to inform policymakers, planners, and business organisations on how to catalyse the sustainable development of bicycle tourism in the Malaysian context.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to determine the principal attributes of bicycle tourists in Malaysia in terms of their demographic and cycling patterns. Thus, the research focuses on defining the key aspects of bicycle tourists in Malaysia that, in turn, will contribute to the better recognition of this growing tourism market and the support of this niche as a sustainably developed and economically profitable one. The study contributes to the current research because there is a very serious gap in the empirical data on the demographic and behavioural characteristics of bicycle tourists in Malaysia, and the contribution made by the current study fills this gap in a very valid manner. These results will assist tourism planners or policymakers, as well as local companies, to come up with specific solutions to improve infrastructure and sustainable tourism and cater to the bicycle tourist population with specific needs (Nazarudin et al., 2020; Tourism Malaysia, 2015). The study, therefore, forms part of academic knowledge and its practice in terms of the tourism bicycle sector in Malaysia.

The research results can offer very useful information about an emerging niche in the Malaysian tourism sector—bicycle tourism. The findings indicated that the high number of bicycle tourists in Malaysia is composed of young adults, especially those falling between the age bracket of 18 and 27 years. People in this age bracket are better suited to cycling, as they tend to be active, adventurous, and health-conscious, which are the physical and recreational requirements of cycling. Although males are more inclined toward the activity, it is also important to note significant involvement of females, which proves that bicycle tourism is an increasingly inclusive and gender-neutral phenomenon.

Educationally, the majority of the respondents possessed a diploma or higher education degree, which proves that this activity is favoured by people with a high level of education who could be more environmentally and health-conscious. Economically, most of the bicycle tourists were employed professionals who happened to spend their money in a way that was inclined towards affordability; most of them would spend their money to buy a beginning-level bicycle, which costs below RM1,000.

Behaviourally, one balanced view shows that bicycle tourism in Malaysia is mostly recreational, whereby the majority of the cyclists log in once a week and mostly on roads. A social aspect is also an important aspect since the majority of the respondents were more interested in cycling with friends or family members, but individual and club types of participation are also present. This was in contrast with many other countries, such as the Czech Republic or Italy, where most of the trips were short and there were no overnight stays, thus showing that bicycle tourism in Malaysia is a developing industry and it can also be expanded into longer-term or longer-duration tourism segments.

Finally, the paper has managed to present the characteristic features of bike tourists in Malaysia. Such observations can assist stakeholders, including the tourism planning team or government departments, or a tourism operator, to adjust their strategies to fit the needs of this segment better. Cognisant of the models of behaviour conducted by these tourists, Malaysia can further develop and popularise bicycle tourism as a sustainable kind of travel that is inclusive and that fosters dancing, economies, and environmental objectives.

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ARTICLE

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# Applying Design Thinking for Tourism Innovation: Developing a Web-Based Platform for Destination Visibility

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**ABSTRACT**

The digital transformation of tourism has created new opportunities for destinations to enhance visibility and engage with potential visitors. However, many tourism destinations still face challenges of digital invisibility, which limits their competitiveness in increasingly technology-driven markets. This study applies the design thinking methodology to develop the Wonder of Jorak (WOJ), a mobile-accessible web-based platform designed to strengthen the digital visibility of Mukim Jorak, Johor. Using a qualitative, user-centered approach, the research engaged local stakeholders and potential visitors across the five stages of design thinking, empathise, define, ideate, prototype, and test. Findings demonstrate that user-centered design processes help uncover user needs, improve usability, and refine destination narratives, resulting in a platform that enhances destination visibility. The study contributes to tourism innovation research by illustrating how design thinking can be systematically applied to digital platform development, offering practical implications for destination in similar contexts.

Keywords: Design Thinking; Digital Visibility; Tourism Innovation; User-Centered Design; Web-Based Platform

Article Classification: Case Study

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is increasingly shaped by digital transformation, with information and communication technologies (ICT) playing a central role in how destinations are promoted, experienced, and managed. Websites, mobile applications, and digital platforms now serve as gateways for visitors seeking information and making travel decisions. Destinations with strong digital presence gain a competitive advantage, while those with weak or fragmented profiles often face challenges of visibility and accessibility in an increasingly technology-driven marketplace (Houssien et al., 2021; Rustam & Yadi, 2023).

Although there is vast technological progress, many smaller or emerging destinations, particularly those in rural settings, continue to face challenges of digital invisibility. These destinations struggle to reach wider audiences and are often overshadowed by better-promoted locations without a centralized and credible online presence. This lack of online presence limits economic opportunities and hinders the realization of their full cultural and economic potential.

The challenge of digital invisibility is compounded by several barriers, including limited local resources, fragmented information across scattered channels, and insufficient digital expertise within local communities. Web-based platforms have been identified in the literature as cost-effective solutions for improving tourism visibility. These platforms provide practical information to visitors while consolidating local attractions, thus reinforcing a cohesive destination identity.

The growing complexity of tourism challenges, which involve technological gaps, human capacity, and local context, requires methodologies that place user needs at the center of solution development (Yasmine & Atmojo, 2022). Design thinking has emerged as a practical and research-oriented framework for addressing such multi-faceted challenges. Its structured phases, Empathise, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test, make it uniquely suitable for exploring complex problems and co-creating solutions in dynamic tourism contexts (Sayed et al., 2024).

Prior studies have highlighted the importance of technological capabilities and current research emphasises that digital platforms must move beyond mere function to deliver authentic narratives (da Luz et al., 2025). Digital visibility is central to destination competitiveness, and a strong digital profile requires quality content and branding to build emotional connections with visitors (Salam, 2024). The methodology adopted here is for ensuring the platform's content is authentic and reflective of the local community's identity.

The study yields three key contributions as it extends tourism innovation literature by operationalizing design thinking for destination visibility, provides a practical model for local stakeholders to enhance digital visibility and methodologically, it illustrates the framework's value as a bridge between research and practical development.

This study aims to develop and evaluate a user-centered digital platform to enhance the digital visibility and competitiveness of a digitally underserved destination, Mukim Jorak. It applies the design thinking methodology as a systematic framework to translate the challenges of digital invisibility and fragmented community narratives into a cost-effective, sustainable web-based solution. It documented the five-stage process, which are empathise, define, ideate, prototype, and test. It also seeks to demonstrate the practical and methodological value of a participatory approach in bridging the digital divide for small-scale tourism destinations. The remainder of this paper covers the literature review, the design thinking process applied to the WOJ platform, the findings and discussion, and concludes with implications for theory and practice.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This review begins with the current technological landscape, examining the essential role of ICT in destination and the resultant challenges of digital invisibility for smaller locations. It then introduces design thinking as a methodological framework suited for developing user-centered digital innovations. Finally, the section covers the importance of digital visibility and collaborative stakeholder engagement for a successful web- based platform.

### 2.1 The Role of Web Technology and the Challenge of Digital Invisibility in Tourism

The advancement of ICT has reshaped how tourism destinations promote themselves and interact with potential visitors. Digital platforms, particularly websites and mobile applications, have become indispensable tools for enhancing accessibility and creating new channels for visitor engagement (Shrestha et al., 2021). ICT, particularly web technology, adoption is a necessity for destinations seeking competitiveness in a global market (Houssien et al., 2021; Rustam & Yadi, 2023).

Many smaller or emerging destinations continue to face challenges of digital invisibility. These destinations struggle to reach wider audiences and are often overshadowed by better-promoted locations without a centralised and credible online presence. Limited resources, fragmented information, and lack of digital expertise contribute to these barriers.

Web-based platforms have been identified as cost-effective solutions for improving tourism visibility. The platforms are able to provide practical information to visitors while also reinforcing destination identity by consolidating local attractions, businesses, and services into an integrated digital interface. Studies show that user-friendly and accessible websites help destinations strengthen market presence and attract new audiences.

### 2.2 Design Thinking as a Methodological Framework for Tourism Innovation

The growing complexity of tourism innovation requires methodologies that place user needs and contextual understanding at the center of solution development. Design thinking has emerged as a practical and research-oriented framework for addressing such challenges. Its flexible phases, empathise, define, ideate, prototype, and test, make it suitable for exploring problems and creating solutions in tourism contexts (Brown, 2009). The process is inherently non-linear, allowing for continuous iteration and refinement (Dam, 2025).

Design thinking has been applied to improve service design, develop digital tools, and enhance visitor experiences in tourism research. The methodology encourages collaboration among multiple stakeholders, ensuring that the outcomes align with both user expectations and destination priorities. Its iterative process also enables flexibility, allowing developers to refine solutions based on feedback and testing.

More inclusive and relevant digital platforms are able to be produced by integrating design thinking into tourism innovation (Rustam & Yadi, 2023). The approach supports technological development and also strengthens co-creation between stakeholders and visitors. This positions design thinking as a bridge between theory and practice, making it a valuable methodological contribution to tourism studies (Sayed et al., 2024).

### 2.3 Digital Visibility and Destination Competitiveness

Digital visibility is central to destination competitiveness in the current tourism landscape. Destinations that maintain high online profiles are more likely to capture visitor attention and influence travel decisions. In contrast, destinations with weak or fragmented digital presence risk being overlooked, regardless of their cultural, natural, or historical assets (Salam, 2024).

Authentic narratives, supported by multimedia content such as photos and videos, provide destinations with a stronger digital identity. This helps build emotional connections with visitors, differentiating destinations in increasingly competitive markets (da Luz et al., 2025).

Digital platforms also play a role in empowering smaller destinations by offering cost-effective ways to consolidate and present local attractions. These platforms are able to promote authenticity and address the visibility by involving community stakeholders. This approach is especially relevant for destinations like Mukim Jorak, where design thinking can be systematically applied to create a user-centered digital platform that strengthens tourism visibility and competitiveness.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative case study approach with design thinking as the methodological guide for developing the Wonder of Jorak (WOJ) platform. This integrated approach was selected because design thinking facilitates user-centered innovation through iterative phases of problem exploration, ideation, and solution testing, which is particularly suited to addressing complex challenges such as the digital invisibility of tourism destinations.

The paper serves to document the systematic application of this process, thus providing a replicable process framework for tourism technology development. The methodology follows the five phases of the design thinking process as in Fig.1, empathise, define, ideate, prototype, and test, providing a structured roadmap for addressing the identified problem (Abdul Aziz et al., 2022).

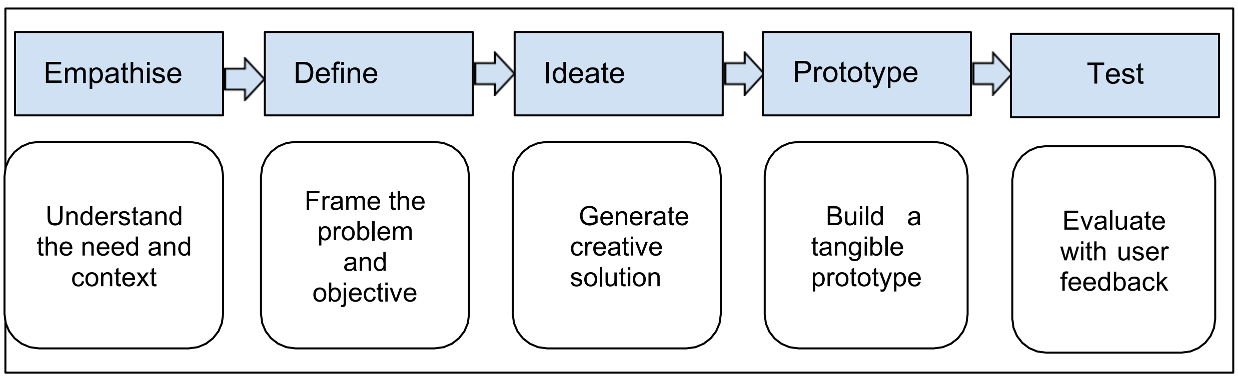


Fig. 1. Five Design Thinking Phases

The development of the WOJ was guided by a design thinking process. Initially, the empathise phase involved engagement with local stakeholders, including university students, residents, and business owners, to uncover their needs. The defined phase articulated Mukim Jorak's challenges of digital invisibility and fragmented tourism information. It sets strategic objectives for a web-based mobile-accessible platform. The ideate phase sparked the generation of innovative solutions, emphasising simplicity and mobile usability for diverse users. A prototype was developed to visualise the key functionalities and user interfaces. Finally, the test phase gathered user feedback to assess visual presentation and content clarity. The test provided suggestions for future improvements based on the prototype. This design thinking approach provided a technology innovation that is aligned with the users' needs for the defined problem. It also provides a space for improvements for future sustainable growth.

### 3.1 Empathise Phase

The empathise phase involved qualitative data collection through interviews with local stakeholders, including university students, residents, and business owners. This was conducted to gain a deep understanding of the user's current situation, local context, and community needs. This process aimed to see the world from the stakeholders' point of view and understand their feelings, aligning with the principles of human-centered design.

### 3.2 Define Phase

The second phase focused on articulating Mukim Jorak's challenges of digital invisibility and fragmented tourism information based on the input from the empathy phase. Strategic objectives for a web-based platform were set. The challenge was framed by articulating a point of view based on three elements: the user, their need, and the compelling insight, which served to guide the digital innovation efforts.

### 3.3 Ideate Phase

The ideate phase sparked the generation of innovative solutions, emphasizing simplicity and mobile usability for diverse users. This phase employed use case analysis to identify core requirements for the WOJ platform. This study used user cases to capture functional needs across three categories: accommodation, restaurants, and education-based attractions. These use cases ensured that the platform structure reflected visitor expectations while providing clarity on system requirements. This approach aligns with Information Technology (IT) methodologies in which requirement analysis forms the basis for effective system and web platform development. The key tool utilized in this phase was the sitemap, which served to set the direction of the web design by visually linking the Homepage to the main content sections: Attraction, Accommodation, and Gastronomy. Visual concepts for each webpage were designed based on this sitemap.

### 3.4 Prototype Phase

A tangible, fully functional website was designed and developed during this phase based on the ideas derived from the sitemap (Newman & Landay, 2000). The purpose of this step was to visualize the platform's information architecture and user interfaces, allowing the team to focus on information clarity and core functionality. The prototype served as the functional model to be evaluated in the subsequent testing phase.

### 3.5 Test Phase

The test phase involved gathering user feedback to assess the prototype's visual presentation, usability, and content clarity. The prototype was tested with actual users to prove the design worked, while simultaneously identifying areas for improvement. The data collected from the user testing provided suggestions for future enhancements and iterative refinement of the WOJ platform.

This methodology ensured that the development of WOJ was both contextually grounded by integrating qualitative data with the design thinking process. This strengthens the findings and demonstrates how design thinking is to be systematically applied as a research framework in tourism innovation.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are structured around the five phases of the design thinking process, empathise, define, ideate, prototype, and test. This reflects the nature of the methodology while providing clarity on how each stage contributed to the development of the WOJ platform. The findings of this study are structured around the five phases of the design thinking process, reflecting the iterative nature of the methodology. Beyond documenting the practical outcomes of creating the WOJ platform, the findings offer broader methodological insights into how design thinking systematically addresses challenges of destination visibility and yields lessons transferable to tourism innovation.

The findings document the practical outcomes of creating a digital tourism solution and also provide broader methodological insights into how design thinking effectively addresses challenges of destination visibility. The systematic progression through the design thinking stages confirms the feasibility of developing the web-based tourism platform for Mukim Jorak. This approach illustrates how the method yields insights applicable to tourism innovation.

### 4.1. Gaining Deep User and Community Insights

The empathise phase initiated the systematic design thinking process by engaging directly with potential users and community stakeholders in Mukim Jorak. This phase was crucial for establishing a human-centered focus, moving beyond assumptions about digital needs to gather authentic, qualitative insights through interviews with university students, local residents, and local business owners. The primary objective was to thoroughly understand their current challenges, aspirations for the area, and how they currently seek or provide tourism information, thus establishing a foundation of empathy as required by the design thinking framework.

This initial deep engagement effectively revealed a significant user need for accessible and highly visible tourism information that specifically supports local businesses. Stakeholders articulated a demand for content that not only provided travel guidance like accommodation and gastronomy details but also showcased local educational opportunities, with respective location. The analysis of these insights highlighted the strategic need to augment existing digital methods with a centralized information hub. This addition would improve the functional necessities of trip planning and capture the unique aspects of the destination's identity.

The results of the empathise phase were fundamental, ensuring that the subsequent design process was purpose-driven and locally relevant. The documentation of core users' needs to establish a clear direction for the defined stage. This direction required the solution that is tangible in the final platform to fulfil the community's current information requirements. This systematic grounding in user empathy was essential for transitioning to the next phase of defining a problem that was needed and impactful.

### 4.2 Articulating Core Problems and Strategic Objectives

The Define phase commenced with the task of structuring the input gathered during the Empathise phase into feasible and solvable problem statements. This process moved beyond the general observation of digital challenges to articulate objectives that the WOJ platform was designed to solve. The synthesis of stakeholders' needs confirmed that the core issue was the fragmentation of information, a condition directly resulting in the digital invisibility of the destination and hindering its market access.

This phase centered on translating the community's unmet needs into a clear definition for the problem to be addressed. It was determined that tourism information is currently fragmented across multiple sources, significantly limiting accessibility, visibility and usability for visitors and prospective students. Furthermore, the absence of a centralised digital hub to consolidate higher education opportunities, homestay accommodations, and local gastronomy offerings does not directly support the tourism growth that benefits community-based enterprises.

This rigorous process of problem articulation demonstrates how design thinking is able to guide technology-enabled tourism innovation. The phase output was used to enhance information visibility and improve the expected user experience by clearly defining the problem and its constraints. This precise definition provided the necessary foundation for the subsequent ideate phase, leading to the identification of the functional requirements needed to deliver practical solutions.

### 4.3 Conceptualizing the Digital Solution

The ideate phase was dedicated to generating and selecting the feasible solution to address the defined problems of information fragmentation and digital invisibility. Based on criteria established in the define phase, a web-based platform was selected. This approach was prioritised over a dedicated mobile application due to its accessibility and lower maintenance requirements, ensuring the solution would be viable for community-based enterprises.

The primary deliverable from this conceptual stage was the sitemap, which serves as the fundamental blueprint for the WOJ platform. This visual structure systematically organised the content, ensuring logical navigation and a clear hierarchy. The conceptual plan provided the platform's content categories by dedicating the main sections of the sitemap to Attraction, Accommodation, and Gastronomy, confirming the platform's architectural focus.

This study used a sitemap for the website design to capture broad categories of visitor needs and identify core functional requirements for the WOJ platform. Three main sections emerged as central to the design: accommodation, restaurants, and education attractions. These served as the foundation for the platform's architecture, ensuring alignment with visitor expectations and the destination's unique identity.

A site map is a diagram used to show the link between the homepage (the term used in design) or index page (the term used in development) to indicate the link between the web pages in a website (Adams & Sagarwala, 2018). It starts with the main page displayed when the domain name is in the URL of the web browser (Newman & Landay, 2000). Fig. 2 displays the site map for the WOJ, including the homepage and main sections.


Fig. 2. The site map displays the homepage and the main section for the website design.

A distinctive finding was the demand for information on education-based attractions, including training centers, institutions, and cultural learning hubs. This reflects Jorak's identity as both a community and an education hub. This third required the platform to deliver structured informational content that goes beyond leisure tourism, offering visitors opportunities for learning and cultural exchange from a web design perspective. The WOJ prototype included a dedicated section on education attractions. Fig. 3 displays the visual concept for the Attraction webpage, which was conceptualised in the ideate phase and served as the basis for the subsequent prototype.

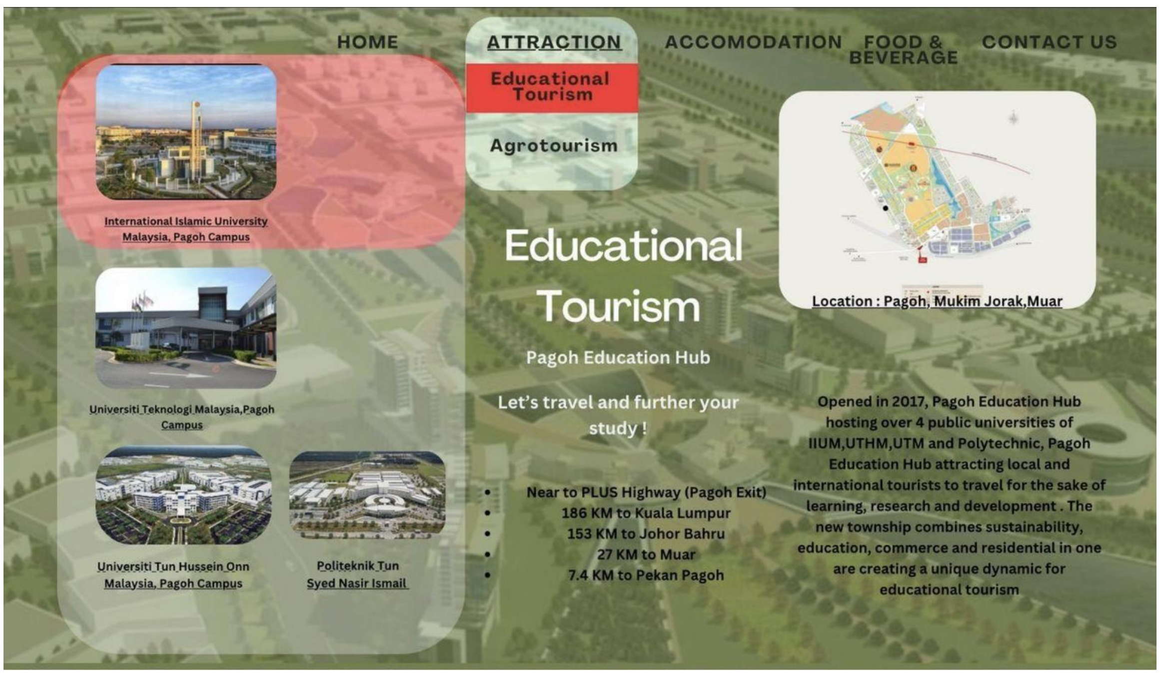


Fig. 3. A visual design from the idea on the attraction webpage.

Accommodation emerged as one of the most frequently mentioned needs among potential visitors. Users emphasized the importance of finding reliable information about lodging options in Jorak, including price ranges, contact details, and location. This reflects the requirement for a centralized accommodation listing from a web technology perspective. The WOJ prototype addressed this by creating a dedicated section. Fig. 4 visualises the accommodation web page, which is based on the sitemap. This design is based on the discussion in the design stage to further the discussion on the possible solution for the defined problem. This has also become the basis for the prototype phase.

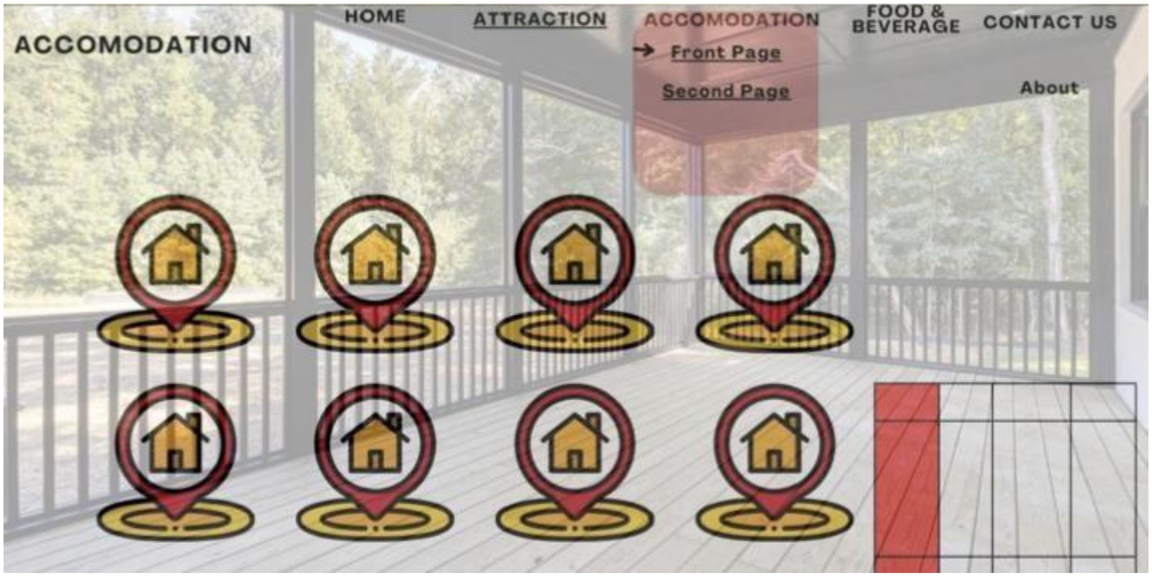


Fig. 4. A visual design from the idea on the accommodation webpage.

The other focused on local food and dining options, which visitors perceived as essential to Jorak's cultural identity. Participants expressed strong interest in discovering authentic food experiences and noted that current information was scattered and inconsistent. This use case required the platform to provide a content-rich, multimedia-driven module that included menus, photos and location.

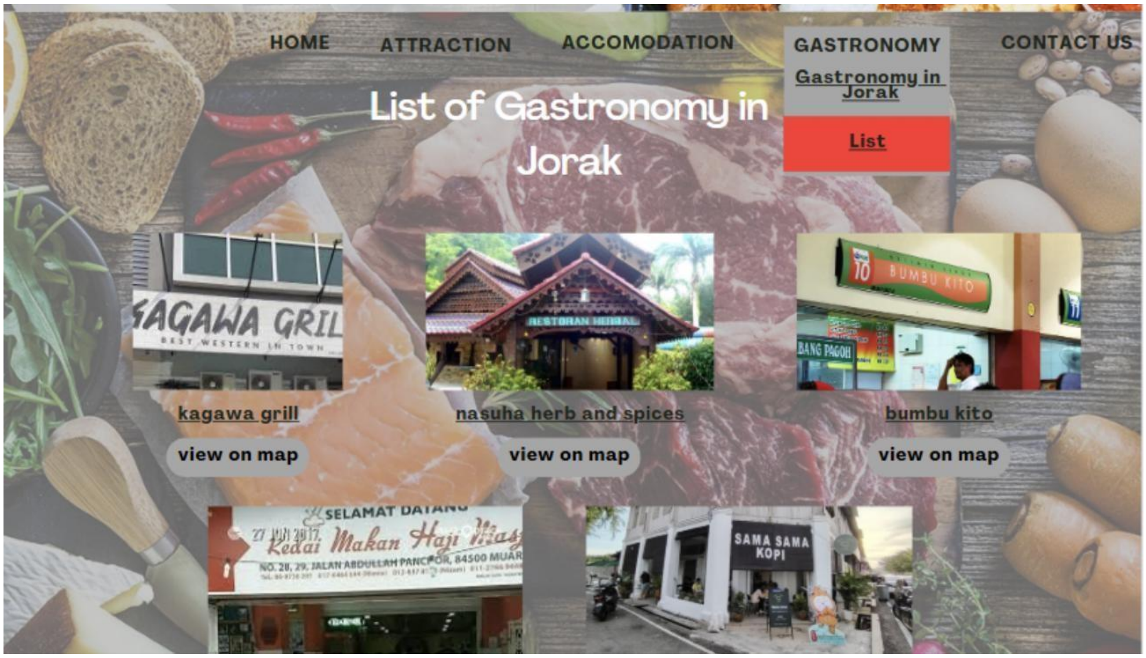


Fig. 5. A visual design from the idea on the gastronomy webpage.

Fig. 5 shows the design of the gastronomy web page, which is one of the web pages in the site map for the WOJ website. This design served as the basis for the prototype. The purpose of this webpage is to highlight local restaurants, which assists in the visitor's planning by highlighting the location and view of the front of the restaurants. This further helps in promoting the local economy.

The ideate phase established the necessary functional framework for the WOJ. The ideate phase established the necessary functional requirements for the WOJ architecture by formalising three use cases. The main use cases are accessing education attractions, viewing accommodation options, and exploring restaurants. These categories were recognised as the components required to provide centralised information for trip planning, thus directly linking the problem of invisibility to a practical structural solution ready for the prototyping phase.

## 4.4 Developing the Functional Platform

The prototype phase successfully transformed the sitemap and visual concepts into a tangible, functional web-based model, thereby confirming the technical feasibility of the proposed solution. The key output of this phase was the development of the linked functional web pages for the Homepage, Attraction, Accommodation, and Gastronomy sections. Each page was designed with an explicit focus on information clarity, intuitive navigation, and accessibility, directly translating the defined phase's requirements into functional features. The prototype's structure ensured a seamless user experience across various devices.

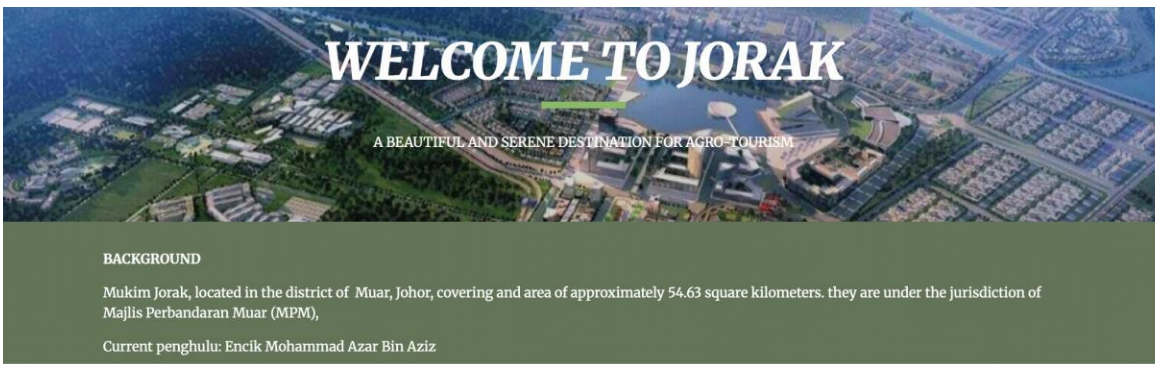


Fig. 6. The prototype homepage.

Fig. 6 shows a screenshot of the homepage, which is functional and linked to the other four web pages, as depicted in the site map in the ideate phase.

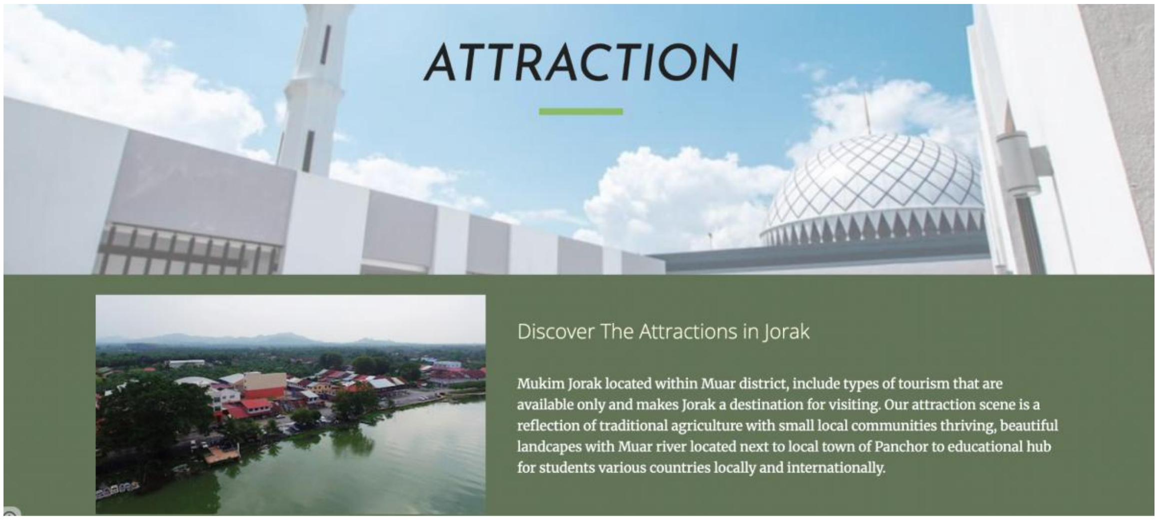


Fig. 7. The prototype attraction webpage.

Fig. 7 is a screenshot of the attraction web page that is functional, and it is linked to the homepage as depicted in the site map in the ideate phase.

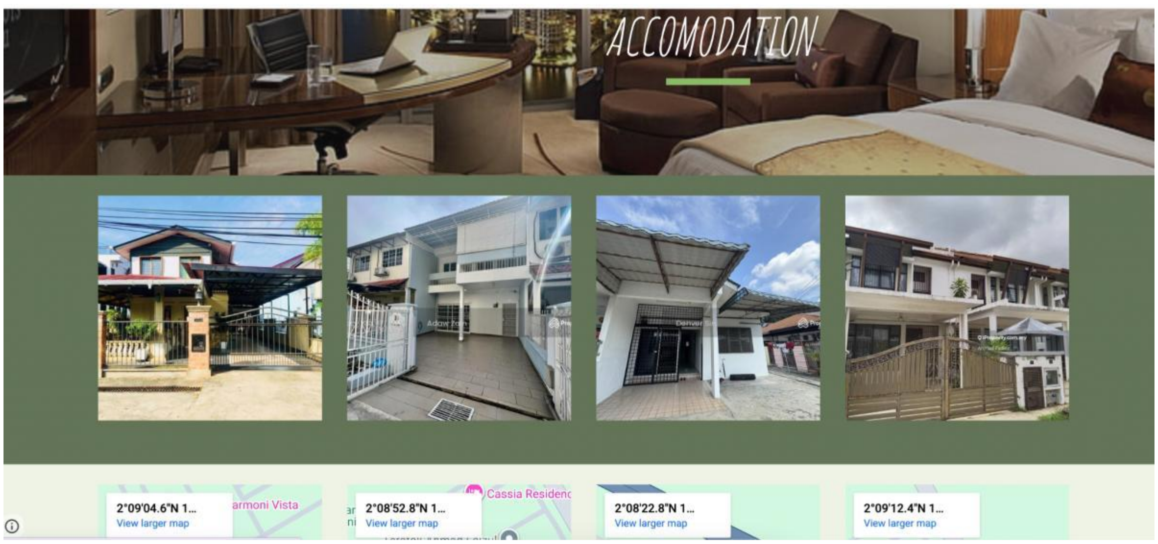


Fig. 8. The prototype accommodation webpage.

Fig. 8 shows a screenshot of the accommodation web page that is functional and linked to the homepage, as depicted in the site map in the ideate phase.


Fig. 9. The prototype gastronomy page.

Fig. 9 is a screenshot of the gastronomy web page that is functional, and it is linked to the homepage as depicted in the site map in the ideate phase.

This functional prototype served as the product for the final phase of the methodology. The prototype validated the initial design decisions. It also provided a concrete basis for gathering objective feedback from actual users, thus maintaining the iterative nature of the design thinking process.

**4.5. User Feedback and Iterative Refinement**

The test phase involved gathering feedback from potential visitors who evaluated the WOJ prototype. The objective was to gather data on the platform’s visual presentation, content clarity, and overall usability. The derived data indicates the platform’s success in content clarity while highlighting areas like visual attractiveness and accessibility for future refinement. and identify specific areas for refinement. This phase successfully validated the design based on direct real-world user interaction and functional assessment.

The test results provided actionable data for iterative refinement. A majority of users confirmed the platform’s success in content clarity and feedback highlighted areas for improvement, such as the need to enhance the overall visual attractiveness and accessibility. The user feedback suggested expanding multimedia content and cultural storytelling to enhance user engagement. This data confirmed that continuous refinement is necessary for alignment with user expectations.

This systematic feedback loop clearly demonstrated the value of the design thinking methodology, particularly its iterative nature. The process ensured that the WOJ platform is aligned with end-user requirements and the specific needs of potential visitors for information quality and usability. This confirmed the feasibility of the developed solution. This phase proves that a user-centered approach effectively translates the problem of digital invisibility into a tangible digital solution that meets both the functional and aesthetic needs of its target users.

**4.6. Discussion of Findings and Theoretical Implications**

The development and positive initial testing of the WOJ platform successfully centralised information and directly addressed the documented problem of digital invisibility in Mukim Jorak. These findings are consistent with research emphasising that ICT plays a vital role in improving accessibility and visibility for tourism destinations (Houssien et al., 2021; Rustam & Yadi, 2023). The platform thus serves as an empirical example of how strategic ICT adoption, guided by user-centered methodology, is able to move a website from fragmented digital obscurity to integrated access.

The problem definition phase provided methodological grounding for the study. The fragmentation of information and the resulting struggle for a cohesive online narrative are not isolated issues in Mukim Jorak as these challenges reflect wider issues noted in tourism innovation literature, where destinations often struggle to articulate a clear and consistent digital identity (Salam, 2024). This approach provided an evidence-based foundation for targeted solutions. It ensured the subsequent design, from the sitemap to the final prototype, was systematically directed toward resolving a validated rather than assumed constraint on local tourism growth.

The ideate and prototype phases produced the design of a web-based platform as the feasible solution for Mukim Jorak. This choice aligns with existing research that highlights the importance of practical web-based platforms as cost-effective tools for destination promotion (da Luz et al., 2025). Brainstorming sessions produced multiple potential solutions, including mobile applications, social media campaigns, and web-based platforms. The idea of developing a mobile-accessible website was prioritised based on criteria of feasibility, accessibility, and stakeholder preferences. The study's approach provides a model suitable for tourism innovation with limited financial and human resources without creating a dependency on external and unsustainable resources.

The observed process across the empathise, ideate, and test stages directly focus on understanding the user's feedback. The design choice reflects findings from previous studies that emphasise user-centered design and co-creation as essential strategies for enhancing digital tourism platforms (Sayed et al., 2024). The digital solutions for underrepresented destinations are effective when incorporating local stakeholders. This participation ensures the product is relevant, usable, and accepted by the local community and contributes to the long-term sustainability of technological innovation.

The test phase results demonstrate the value of testing for refining tourism technology and demonstrate the applicability of the design thinking methodology to enhance user experience. The quantitative data collected, particularly the feedback on clarity and usability, provided a basis for necessary refinements, thereby reinforcing the established research on the importance of user evaluation in technology development. This highlights that design thinking serves as a development framework and a tool for ensuring that digital solutions are user-aligned, leading to improved satisfaction in user experience.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study aligns directly with wider concerns in tourism literature that many destinations, particularly smaller or less-promoted ones, struggle to establish digital visibility in an increasingly digital marketplace. Consequently, this paper provides a replicable, user-centered framework for translating fragmented community needs into a sustainable technological solution. Multiple stakeholders including community members, students, and potential visitors were involved.

The development of the Wonder of Jorak (WOJ) platform systematically demonstrates the application of design thinking to address challenges of digital invisibility in tourism destinations. The application of the design thinking process provided valuable insights into how user-centered approaches enhance digital solutions for tourism destinations. The empathise and defined phases revealed the need in Jorak's offerings. Ideation and prototyping phases ensured that proposed technological solutions directly reflected the user needs. Feedback gathered during the test phase emphasized the ability of the proposed solution to solve the defined problem. These findings underscore the broader value of design thinking for tourism innovation. It demonstrates that a design thinking aligns technological development with both visitor expectations and destination identity.

### 5.1 Implications

This study demonstrates how design thinking is systematically applied as a methodological framework for tourism innovation. Prior research has highlighted the importance of ICT in improving destination visibility and few studies have detailed how user-centered approaches should be operationalized in tourism research (Houssien et al., 2021; Rustam & Yadi, 2023) . This study offers an example of how theory and practice intersect in tourism innovation by aligning the design thinking process with qualitative data collection and analysis.

The findings extend current tourism technology literature by showing that digital invisibility is not merely a technical problem but also a researchable issue of digital destination innovation. Mukim Jorak illustrates how limited digital presence constrains local tourism development, echoing broader concerns in the literature on uneven adoption of digital tools (da

Luz et al., 2025). The research contributes a novel perspective that integrates problem-solving and academic inquiry by framing this challenge through design thinking.

The study also adds to ongoing debates on destination visibility by emphasising the role of user-centered narrative in digital tourism platforms. Previous studies have focused primarily on technological capabilities, and the WOJ findings suggest that the quality of content that met the needs of the users are important. This insight highlights the need for future research to explore how design methodologies are able to capture and align technological development with user expectations and destination identity.

The results have direct implications for destination managers, local stakeholders, and higher education learners seeking to enhance destination visibility (Indrianto et al., 2024). The WOJ platform illustrates that even with limited resources, destinations are able to adopt cost-effective digital strategies to consolidate tourism information and improve accessibility. This is particularly relevant for rural or less-promoted destinations where budgets for professional marketing campaigns are often restricted.

The study demonstrates the importance of collaboration in building a coherent destination identity for local stakeholders. Businesses, education hubs, and accommodation providers in Jorak contributed to the platform, creating a more comprehensive and appealing digital presence. This collaborative approach strengthens competitiveness and ensures that multiple voices are represented in the destination narrative. The project offers an experiential model for applying design thinking in tourism contexts, equipping higher education learners with transferable skills for professional practice.

Methodologically, the study provides evidence of the value of design thinking as a structured research approach in tourism studies. The process of empathizing, defining, ideating, prototyping, and testing ensured that the platform development was grounded in both user needs and contextual realities. This strengthens the argument that design thinking is not only a practical tool but also a rigorous framework for conducting systematic research in applied tourism contexts.

This study illustrates how design thinking serves as a bridge between academic research and applied digital innovation. The study offers a replicable model for other researchers and practitioners seeking to apply design thinking in tourism technology development by documenting each stage of the process. This reinforces its value as both a methodological framework and a tool for generating transferable insights in tourism innovation.

### 5.2 Limitations and Future Research

Future research is needed to extend this work by applying design thinking to incorporate advanced features such as augmented reality, gamification, and interactive storytelling. Other technology platform extensions help in enriching destination experiences and user engagement.

It further reinforces the role of design thinking as a methodological foundation for sustained digital innovation in tourism destinations.

The study yields three contributions to the field. It extends the tourism innovation literature by systematically demonstrating how design thinking can be applied as a methodology to enhance destination visibility, particularly within digitally underserved areas, from a research perspective. The findings demonstrate a model for collaboration, guiding destination managers, local stakeholders, and higher education learners on how to produce cost-effective, user-centred digital platforms, from a practical perspective. The study illustrates the value of design thinking as a research framework and approach, ensuring that tourism platforms remain aligned with end-user expectations and contextual realities, from a methodological perspective. These three contributions position design thinking as a bridge between academic research and practical tourism development.

Future research should also explore the educational potential of integrating design thinking into tourism innovation curriculum. Universities can bridge theoretical knowledge with real-world application and industry challenges by involving higher education learners in co-creation projects. This integration would foster innovation, build essential digital skills, and strengthen collaboration among academia, the tourism industry, and local communities. These educational initiatives would benefit student professional development and also contribute directly to technology tourism innovation of destination development.

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ARTICLE

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# *Usrah in Action* dan Edupelancongan: Memacu Literasi Murid Luar Bandar Pagoh

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## ABSTRAK

Program *Usrah in Action* yang digabungkan dengan konsep edupelancongan telah dilaksanakan bagi membantu meningkatkan tahap literasi murid luar bandar di Pagoh. Artikel ini membentangkan kajian yang dijalankan untuk menilai masalah literasi asas dalam kalangan murid sekolah rendah luar bandar dan keberkesanan program intervensi yang melibatkan pembelajaran berasaskan tempat serta sukarelawan berasaskan nilai Islam. Seramai 33 orang murid tahap 1 dan tahap 2 dari kelas pemulihan dipilih sebagai peserta kajian. Mereka telah melalui ujian pra bagi menentukan tahap literasi Bahasa Melayu, disusuli program edupelancongan berupa lawatan pembelajaran ke kampus Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia (UIAM) yang melibatkan aktiviti bimbingan membaca oleh 33 orang mahasiswa daripada Jabatan Bahasa Melayu, Jabatan Bahasa Inggeris, Jabatan Bahasa Arab dan Jabatan Pelancongan. Ujian pasca dijalankan untuk menilai peningkatan literasi, di samping temu bual dengan guru, ibu bapa dan analisis dokumen untuk menilai impak program secara kualitatif. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan tahap literasi Bahasa Melayu murid pemulihan telah meningkat sebanyak 63.7%, selepas program *Usrah in Action* dan edupelancongan berbanding hanya 9% dalam ujian pra. Perbincangan artikel menyoroti faktor kekangan literasi dalam kalangan komuniti luar bandar serta bagaimana pendekatan kolaboratif antara universiti dengan pihak sekolah melalui *Usrah in Action* dan edupelancongan dapat mengatasi jurang tersebut. Implikasinya, kerjasama strategik sedemikian berpotensi dijadikan model dalam usaha memperkasakan literasi golongan murid terpinggir.

Kata kunci: Edupelancongan; Literasi; Luar bandar; Program intervensi; *Usrah in Action*

Klasifikasi Artikel: Kertas Penyelidikan

## 1. PENGENALAN

Literasi asas yang merangkumi kemahiran membaca, menulis, mendengar dan bertutur merupakan prasyarat penting untuk kejayaan akademik murid (Idrus, 2024). Namun, masih terdapat jurang yang ketara antara pencapaian literasi murid di kawasan bandar berbanding dengan luar bandar. Di Malaysia, hanya 58% murid menguasai kemahiran membaca dengan baik menjelang akhir Tahun 5, menunjukkan masih ramai murid luar bandar ketinggalan dalam literasi (Choudhury, 2024). Menurut Choudhury (2024), laporan Bank Dunia mendedahkan bahawa secara purata murid Malaysia mengikuti 12.5 tahun persekolahan formal tetapi pencapaian pembelajaran mereka setara dengan hanya 8.9 tahun, jauh lebih rendah berbanding dengan rakan sebaya di negara jiran seperti Vietnam. Keadaan ini membimbangkan terutamanya bagi keluarga berpendapatan rendah (B40) di luar bandar, yang sering berhadapan kekangan sosioekonomi dan kekurangan sumber sokongan pendidikan di rumah (Yahaya, 2025). Murid di Pagoh, Johor, yang majoritinya datang dari komuniti kampung dan kawasan pertanian turut berdepan dengan cabaran serupa. Pagoh secara umumnya dikategorikan sebagai kawasan luar bandar dengan infrastruktur pendidikan yang terhad. Ketiadaan bimbingan di rumah akibat ibu bapa sibuk mencari rezeki dan berpendidikan rendah, serta saiz kelas yang besar di sekolah (mencecah ~50 orang per kelas), mengakibatkan murid kurang mendapat perhatian individu dan tumpuan dalam pembelajaran. Fenomena ini selari dengan kajian Pane et al. (2025) yang mendapati kelemahan literasi murid luar bandar dipengaruhi oleh kurangnya galakan ibu bapa (yang sering kurang mahir atau tiada masa untuk membantu) dan halangan sosioekonomi keluarga.

Bagi menangani masalah tersebut, pendekatan intervensi yang inovatif dan bersifat menyeluruh diperlukan. *Usrah in Action* merupakan inisiatif sukarelawan berasaskan nilai Islam di peringkat universiti yang melibatkan para mahasiswa turun padang membantu komuniti. Program ini berlandaskan konsep *service learning* (pembelajaran melalui khidmat masyarakat) di mana mahasiswa mengaplikasikan pengetahuan akademik untuk menyelesaikan isu komuniti sambil memupuk kemahiran insaniah. Nilai kesukarelawanan dalam Islam seperti semangat *ukhuwah*, kepedulian sosial dan tanggungjawab fardu kifayah dijadikan teras, menjadikan program ini unik. Dari perspektif Islam, kerja sukarela dilihat sebagai satu bentuk *sadaqah* (amal jariah) dan dianggap sebahagian daripada ibadah, yakni setiap amalan membantu orang lain dinilai sebagai ibadat yang mendapat ganjaran pahala (Alzaareer dan Abdalla, 2023; Keskin dan Yucel, 2020; Sahri et al., 2016). Justeru, mahasiswa yang terlibat cenderung mempunyai motivasi intrinsik yang tinggi untuk membantu murid-murid tersebut demi memenuhi tanggungjawab sosial dan agama mereka.

Selain itu, konsep edupelancongan atau pelancongan pendidikan digunakan dalam program ini sebagai pendekatan pembelajaran berasaskan tempat (*place-based learning*). Edupelancongan merujuk kegiatan pendidikan di luar bilik darjah yang digabungkan dengan elemen lawatan atau pelancongan bagi memberikan pengalaman pembelajaran secara interaktif dan kontekstual. Menurut Yfantidou dan Goulimaris (2018), edupelancongan menyediakan peluang pembelajaran unik meliputi aktiviti pengembaraan atau lawatan dijadikan medium pendidikan, sekali gus merangsang minat dan motivasi peserta melalui pengalaman dunia sebenar. Contohnya, lawatan sambil belajar ke institusi pendidikan tinggi atau tapak bersejarah dapat memperkayakan pengetahuan murid di samping menjadikan pembelajaran lebih bermakna dan menyeronokkan. Pendekatan pembelajaran berasaskan tempat sedemikian juga selari dengan dapatan bahawa pengalaman dunia nyata dapat meningkatkan penglibatan murid serta mengukuhkan pemahaman konsep yang dipelajari di kelas.

Berpandukan latar belakang di atas, kajian integrasi program *Usrah in Action* dan *edupelancongan* merupakan satu model intervensi untuk meningkatkan tahap literasi murid luar bandar. Antara objektif kajian yang dikenal pasti adalah seperti berikut, (1) mengkaji tahap literasi Bahasa Melayu dalam kalangan murid sekolah rendah kebangsaan di kawasan luar bandar Pagoh sebelum pelaksanaan intervensi dan (2) menilai keberkesanan program intervensi literasi membaca berasaskan *Usrah in Action* dan edupelancongan (lawatan pembelajaran) dalam meningkatkan kemahiran literasi murid-murid pemulihan di sekolah yang terlibat.

Dengan pelaksanaan program yang menggabungkan sukarelawan mahasiswa dan pendekatan pembelajaran kontekstual, diharapkan jurang literasi dapat dikecilkan dan model ini boleh diaplikasi di komuniti luar bandar yang lain pada masa hadapan.

## 2. TINJAUAN LITERATUR

Polisi kerajaan Malaysia mutakhir memberikan tumpuan kepada peningkatan celik literasi asas dan digital. *Pelan Pembangunan Pendidikan Malaysia 2013–2025 (PPPM)* menetapkan sasaran peningkatan literasi asas serta penguasaan 3M melalui pelbagai program sokongan (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia [KPM], 2013). Selari dengan itu, *Dasar Pendidikan Digital 2023* diperkenalkan untuk memperkukuh literasi digital, akses infrastruktur serta kemahiran teknologi dalam kalangan murid dan pendidik (KPM, 2023). Sementara itu, *MyDIGITAL: Malaysia Digital Economy Blueprint* turut menekankan pembangunan ekosistem pendidikan digital dan penyediaan capaian Internet yang inklusif (Unit Perancang Ekonomi, 2021).

Di peringkat institusi pengajian tinggi, *University for Society (U4S)* dilaksanakan oleh Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi sebagai usaha menggalakkan universiti melaksanakan projek komuniti berimpak tinggi (Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi Malaysia, 2021). UIAM menyahut seruan ini melalui pelaksanaan kursus *Usrah in Action*, yang menekankan integrasi nilai Islam, ilmu dan khidmat komuniti sebagai sebahagian daripada kurikulum universiti (International Islamic University Malaysia [IIUM], 2021). Di samping itu, kampus UIAM Pagoh turut melaksanakan pelbagai program flagship seperti *Flagship Pagoh* yang memberikan fokus kepada pemerkasaan komuniti luar bandar melalui aktiviti pendidikan, pelancongan pendidikan dan bengkel literasi (IIUM, 2022). Pendekatan universiti ini sejajar dengan agenda nasional untuk merapatkan jurang literasi bandar-luar bandar, di samping menyokong hasrat membudayakan pendidikan sepanjang hayat.

Literasi dalam Kalangan Murid Luar Bandar: Literasi asas (kemahiran 3M – membaca, menulis, mengira) merupakan indikator utama yang mempengaruhi prestasi keseluruhan murid. Pelbagai kajian mendapati murid di kawasan luar bandar sering ketinggalan dari segi pencapaian literasi berbanding dengan rakan sebaya di kawasan bandar (Pane et al., 2025). Faktor-faktor yang menyumbang kepada jurang ini termasuklah latar sosioekonomi keluarga, tahap pendidikan ibu bapa, kekangan infrastruktur, serta persekitaran pembelajaran di rumah. Kajian oleh Pane et al. (2025) di Pahang, Malaysia menunjukkan kelemahan kelancaran membaca dalam kalangan murid luar bandar berkait rapat dengan peranan ibu bapa. Ramai ibu bapa di luar bandar tidak dapat membimbing anak-anak dalam aktiviti membaca kerana kekurangan kemahiran bahasa atau kesibukan bekerja mencari nafkah. Ketiadaan rangsangan literasi di rumah mengakibatkan pembelajaran murid hanya terbatas di sekolah. Selain itu, sesetengah sekolah luar bandar menghadapi isu bilangan murid per kelas yang terlalu ramai, menyebabkan guru sukar memberikan perhatian individu kepada murid lemah. Justeru, intervensi tambahan di luar waktu sekolah adalah kritikal untuk membantu murid yang tercicir ini.

Konsep edupelancongan dan Pembelajaran Berasaskan Tempat didefinisikan sebagai gabungan aktiviti pelancongan dan pendidikan di mana proses pembelajaran berlaku melalui pengalaman langsung di lokasi luar daripada persekitaran bilik darjah formal (Ritchie et al., 2003). Konsep ini semakin mendapat perhatian sebagai kaedah pembelajaran alternatif yang dapat meningkatkan motivasi dan minat pelajar terhadap sesuatu subjek. Menurut Zulkifli (2024) pula, edupelancongan bukan sekadar lawatan suka-suka tetapi edupelancongan dapat memberikan peluang kepada kanak-kanak dan remaja menikmati pembelajaran secara interaktif dalam suasana baharu, contohnya di alam semula jadi atau institusi tertentu, sekali gus menggalakkan mereka lebih aktif secara fizikal dan mental dalam pembelajaran. Yfantidou dan Goulimaris (2018) menekankan bahawa edupelancongan mempunyai impak positif yang luas kerana edupelancongan melibatkan pelbagai komponen seperti pengangkutan, rekreasi, interaksi sosial, kebudayaan dan pendidikan dalam satu pakej pengalaman. Di kawasan luar bandar, edupelancongan boleh dimanfaatkan untuk mendedahkan murid kepada dunia luar dan sumber pembelajaran baharu. Pendekatan ini juga selari dengan *pembelajaran kontekstual*, di mana pengetahuan disampaikan melalui konteks dunia sebenar agar murid lebih mudah memahami dan menghargai ilmu yang dipelajari. Contohnya, lawatan ke sebuah universiti berdekatan boleh membuka minda murid luar bandar mengenai suasana pembelajaran di menara gading, sekali gus menyemai aspirasi untuk melanjutkan pendidikan ke peringkat yang lebih tinggi. Tinjauan literatur menunjukkan pembelajaran berasaskan tempat mampu memberikan pengalaman mendalam dan meningkatkan pencapaian pembelajaran, terutamanya bagi murid yang kurang bermotivasi dalam kaedah pembelajaran konvensional di kelas (Abdul Latif dan Mat Zin, 2019).

Sukarelawan Berasaskan Islam dan *Service Learning*: *Usrah in Action* adalah contoh program *service learning* unik yang diterapkan di Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia (UIAM) untuk menggalakkan mahasiswa melibatkan diri dalam projek pembangunan komuniti (Abdullah et al. 2024). Berbeza dengan kerja sukarela biasa, program ini disulam dengan nilai-nilai Islam dan matlamat pembangunan lestari. Sukarelawan mahasiswa digalakkan menghayati konsep *ukhuwah fillah* (persaudaraan kerana Allah) dan *ikhlas* dalam membantu komuniti setempat. Penekanan kepada niat dan ganjaran akhirat menjadikan motivasi sukarelawan lebih teguh dan berterusan (Keskin dan Yucel, 2020). Literatur mengenai kesukarelawanan Islam menunjukkan bahawa aktiviti sukarela dianggap sebagai manifestasi prinsip etika Islam, di mana membantu orang lain dilihat sebagai tanggungjawab moral dan ibadah (Keskin dan Yucel, 2020; Sahri et al., 2016). Sahri et al. (2016) menegaskan bahawa falsafah ibadah dalam Islam merangkumi usaha-usaha sosial seperti mengajar, membimbing dan kerja komuniti sebagai cara untuk mendekatkan diri kepada Tuhan. Dalam konteks pendidikan, penglibatan sukarelawan berteras Islam dapat memberikan contoh teladan yang baik kepada murid serta mewujudkan suasana pembelajaran yang penyayang dan menyokong. Kajian lapangan oleh Cebecioglu, (2019) mendapati penglibatan dalam kerja komuniti mampu memupuk nilai iman dan takwa dalam kalangan belia, di samping meningkatkan rasa tanggungjawab sivik mereka. Oleh itu, pendekatan *Usrah in Action* bukan sahaja memberikan manfaat akademik kepada murid, malah menyuntik nilai murni dan motivasi rohani baik kepada murid mahupun para sukarelawan sendiri (Nahar, 2023).

Berdasarkan sorotan literatur ini, dapat dirumuskan bahawa intervensi literasi yang berkesan untuk murid luar bandar perlu merangkumi: Pertama pengalaman pembelajaran autentik, contohnya melalui edupelancongan yang menyediakan konteks dunia sebenar dan menyeronokkan; kedua, sokongan sukarelawan dan mentor, khususnya yang memahami nilai komuniti dan mempunyai empati tinggi, seperti mahasiswa dalam program berteras Islam; dan ketiga, penglibatan komuniti setempat termasuk ibu bapa dan institusi tempatan, untuk memastikan keberhasilan program dapat dikekalkan. Kombinasi ketiga-tiga elemen ini diyakini dapat menangani punca masalah literasi di luar bandar secara holistik, seterusnya meningkatkan keberkesanan sesuatu program literasi.

## 3. METODOLOGI

Kajian ini menggunakan reka bentuk penyelidikan berbentuk kajian tindakan dengan elemen eksperimen ringkas (ujian pra dan pasca) serta kaedah kualitatif sokongan. Lokasi kajian ialah sebuah sekolah rendah kebangsaan di kawasan Pagoh, Johor yang tergolong dalam kategori luar bandar. Sampel kajian terdiri daripada murid Tahap 1 dan Tahap 2 yang dikenal pasti berada di dalam kelas pemulihan khas Bahasa Melayu kerana belum menguasai literasi asas membaca. Seramai 33 orang murid (20 orang lelaki dan 13 orang perempuan) dipilih secara bertujuan dengan kerjasama guru pemulihan sekolah tersebut. Murid-murid ini berumur sekitar 8-11 tahun dan kesemuanya berasal dari komuniti setempat berpendapatan rendah. Sebelum intervensi, ujian pra literasi dijalankan menggunakan instrumen penilaian literasi asas Bahasa Melayu yang merangkumi kemahiran membaca perkataan, memahami ayat mudah dan menulis perkataan.

Guru pemulihan menjalankan ujian ini secara individu kepada setiap orang murid. Skor literasi ditentukan berdasarkan *Rubrik Literasi Kelas Pemulihan* yang menilai tahap penguasaan huruf (tahap paling rendah, ditanda sebagai K1) hingga kefahaman petikan ringkas (tahap tertinggi, ditanda sebagai K32).Intervensi: Program intervensi dijalankan selama tiga hari dua malam dalam bentuk kem literasi berkonsepkan edupelancongan di *Pagoh Education Hub*, iaitu kompleks hab pendidikan yang menempatkan cawangan universiti. Program dinamakan "Jom Celik Membaca Pagoh" ini melibatkan kerjasama antara sekolah, universiti (UIAM Pagoh) dan komuniti setempat. Murid-murid dibawa melawat ke Kulliyyah Pelancongan Mampan dan Bahasa Kontemporari di UIAM Kampus Pagoh, sebagai lokasi utama program. Di sana, mereka disambut dan dibimbing oleh sekumpulan 33 orang mahasiswa UIAM yang bertindak sebagai fasilitator sukarelawan di bawah kursus *Usrah in Action 2.* Pelbagai aktiviti pembelajaran berasaskan tempat telah disusun:

Aktiviti pertama adalah merupakan Modul Bacaan "Kaedah Membaca Pantas" di mana murid menjalani sesi intensif belajar membaca menggunakan modul "Kaedah Membaca Pantas" iaitu satu modul fonik Bahasa Melayu yang interaktif. Sesi ini dijalankan di ruang bacaan fakulti dengan suasana kondusif. Setiap fasilitator mahasiswa memimpin seorang murid secara dekat, memberikan tunjuk ajar cara mengeja, mengenal suku kata, dan seterusnya membaca ayat mudah. Pendekatan *mentor-mentee* ini memastikan murid mendapat perhatian individu dan bimbingan mengikut tahap masing-masing berbantukan gajet-gajet digital.

Gambar 1. Program *Usrah in Action* 1 di Sekolah Kebangsaan Pekan Pagoh


Gambar 2. Program *Usrah in Action* 2 di Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia

Aktiviti Literasi Bersepadu adalah aktiviti kedua iaitu murid turut terlibat dalam aktiviti pengayaan seperti *literacy scavenger hunt* di sekitar kampus (mencari objek berdasarkan klu bertulis), bercerita secara berkumpulan, dan lawatan ke bilik-bilik komputer di UIAM. Aktiviti santai seperti pertandingan mengeja, teka silang kata, mencari harta karun dan nyanyian lagu kanak-kanak bermesej pendidikan juga diselitkan bagi menambah keseronokan. Semua aktiviti direka bentuk agar murid pemulihan belajar secara tidak langsung dalam suasana yang menyeronokkan, selaras dengan konsep edupelancongan.

 

Gambar 3 dan Gambar 4. Aktiviti di sekitar kawasan universiti dan di bilik Komputer

Aktiviti seterusnya adalah interaksi dengan Komuniti Universiti. Selain sesi akademik, murid diberi peluang berinteraksi dengan warga kampus dengan melawat kafe siswa, bilik-bilik pameran dan dewan kuliah bagi merasai pengalaman suasana pembelajaran di universiti. Mahasiswa sukarelawan bertindak sebagai pemandu pelancong pendidikan, menerangkan tempat-tempat tersebut dalam Bahasa Melayu mudah. Pendekatan ini bertujuan menyuntik motivasi dan cita-cita dalam diri murid untuk terus belajar sehingga ke menara gading.

 

Gambar 5 dan Gambar 6. Program Membaca di Dewan UIAM

Program berjalan dari pagi hingga petang setiap hari, dan murid pulang ke rumah penginapan (Mahallah / Asrama kolej kediaman yang disediakan) pada waktu malam bawah pengawasan guru pengiring. Ibu bapa murid turut dijemput hadir pada hari terakhir program untuk menyaksikan persembahan membaca oleh anak-anak mereka dan mengambil bahagian dalam sesi maklum balas.

Selepas tamat program (selang seminggu kemudian), murid-murid melalui ujian pasca literasi yang sama formatnya dengan ujian pra. Perbandingan skor pra dan pasca digunakan untuk menilai peningkatan tahap literasi masing-masing. Data kuantitatif skor literasi dianalisis secara deskriptif (peratusan peningkatan, skor min kumpulan) memandangkan saiz sampel hanya 33 orang.

Bagi melengkapi data kuantitatif, temu bual separa berstruktur dijalankan melibatkan: (a) Guru pemulihan untuk mendapatkan perspektif mengenai perubahan tingkah laku dan prestasi murid sebelum dan selepas program; (b) Ibu bapa murid untuk memahami rutin literasi di rumah dan kesan program terhadap minat anak-anak; dan (c) Pentadbir sekolah (Guru Besar, Guru Penolong Kanan dan Pegawai-pegawai Pemulihan Daerah), untuk menilai pandangan pihak sekolah tentang keberkesanan kolaborasi universiti dengan sekolah ini. Setiap temu bual mengambil masa 20-30 minit dan direkodkan dengan kebenaran responden. Selain itu, analisis dokumen dilakukan ke atas buku latihan murid, rekod bacaan, dan modul “Kaedah Membaca Pantas” yang digunakan, bagi meneliti perkembangan kemahiran secara lebih terperinci (contoh: jumlah halaman modul yang berjaya diselesaikan murid, catatan guru tentang kemajuan murid).

Keabsahan dan Kebolehpercayaan: Untuk meningkatkan keabsahan, triangulasi kaedah dilaksanakan dengan memadankan dapatan daripada ujian literasi, temu bual, dan analisis dokumen. Borang soal selidik dianalisis menggunakan kaedah analisis tema bagi mengenal pasti pola respons guru dan ibu bapa tentang perubahan literasi murid. Kajian ini turut mendapatkan *member-checking* dengan mengembalikan ringkasan dapatan kepada guru terlibat bagi pengesahan. Segala prosedur kajian diluluskan oleh pentadbiran sekolah dan mendapat kebenaran ibu bapa murid, dengan pematuhan kepada etika penyelidikan (kerahsiaan identiti murid dan penggunaan data hanya untuk tujuan akademik).

## 4. DAPATAN KAJIAN

### 4.1 Dapatan Objektif 1

Untuk mengkaji tahap literasi Bahasa Melayu dalam kalangan murid sekolah rendah kebangsaan di kawasan luar bandar Pagoh sebelum pelaksanaan intervensi. Berdasarkan Ujian pra yang dijalankan sebelum program menunjukkan tahap literasi murid berada pada tahap yang sangat rendah. Daripada 33 orang peserta, hanya tiga orang murid yang menguasai kemahiran mengenal huruf dan mengeja suku kata paling asas. (dikategorikan pada tahap K1 hingga K4 mengikut rubrik pemulihan), manakala tiada murid yang mampu membaca perkataan mudah dan tidak dapat memahami ayat ringkas dengan baik (tahap sekitar K6 hingga K10). Secara purata, skor pencapaian literasi pra adalah 9% sahaja berbanding dengan silibus Tahun 5. Hal ini bermakna murid-murid tersebut masih berjuang dengan kemahiran membaca peringkat awal walaupun usia mereka sudah 11 tahun. Cuma seorang murid dikenal pasti menghadapi masalah kritikal dan dicalonkan untuk Program Outreach iaitu Kelas Pendidikan Khas.

Dapatan hasil temu bual bersama dengan tiga guru yang mengajar di kelas pemulihan mengakui, mereka menyatakan bahawa murid pemulihan sebelum program,

*"masih merangkak membaca, banyak yang belum kenal 'ng' atau 'sy'... mereka hanya boleh baca perkataan dua suku kata, itu pun tersekat-sekat."* (Guru BM 1)

Keputusan ujian pra turut konsisten dengan rekod pemantauan guru sebelum ini yang menunjukkan majoriti murid dalam kumpulan ini belum menguasai kemahiran 3M sejak Tahap I (Tahun 1 hingga 3). Antara faktor yang dikenal pasti melalui temu bual guru dan ibu bapa termasuklah kurangnya amalan membaca di rumah, tiada bahan bacaan sesuai, dan ketiadaan bimbingan khusus kerana ibu bapa tidak berupaya membantu. Kenyataan-kenyataan ini menggambarkan ekosistem pembelajaran di rumah yang lemah, menyumbang kepada tahap literasi pra intervensi yang rendah.

### 4.2 Dapatan Objektif 2

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menilai keberkesanan program intervensi literasi membaca berasaskan *Usrah in Action* dan edupelancongan (lawatan pembelajaran) dalam meningkatkan kemahiran literasi murid-murid pemulihan di sekolah yang terlibat.

Berdasarkan hasil temu bual bersama dengan murid pemulihan, guru yang mengajar di kelas pemulihan dan ibu bapa yang terlibat berikut merupakan respons daripada mereka.

Guru kelas mendapati murid yang terlibat dengan program Usrah in Action dan Edupelancongan kini lebih berani membaca kuat di kelas dan tidak segan meminta pertolongan jika tidak faham sesuatu perkataan. Jelasnya, keyakinan diri murid-murid menunjukkan peningkatan dalam pembelajaran. Pemerhatian pasca program mendapati mereka lebih aktif menyertai aktiviti membaca bersama dengan rakan sebaya dan tidak lagi malu dengan kekurangan diri. Perkara ini diluahkan oleh seorang murid (dalam sesi refleksi bersama dengan guru pemulihan):

*"Seronok belajar kat UIA hari tu, sekarang saya rasa saya pun boleh pandai macam orang lain kalau saya cuba. Dulu saya ingat saya kurang pandai, tapi abang kakak kat universiti kata saya hebat boleh catch up cepat."* (Subjek kajian 6)

Ucapan murid ini memperlihatkan betapa pujian dan sokongan moral daripada fasilitator universiti meningkatkan harga diri dan motivasi intrinsik murid. Sekarang saya sudah yakin untuk masuk pertandingan bercerita kerana saya sudah boleh membaca Bahasa Melayu.

Analisis modul "Kaedah Membaca Pantas" yang dilengkapkan semasa program menunjukkan murid telah menguasai banyak kemahiran asas membaca. Misalnya, dalam modul tersebut terdapat 30 latihan, dan rata-rata murid berjaya menyiapkan hingga latihan ke-25 ke atas. Kesalahan ejaan dan bacaan yang dicatat guru dalam modul juga berkurang daripada awal hingga akhir program. Murid kini boleh mengenal pasti suku kata kompleks seperti "ng", "sy", "ber-", dan "-kan" dengan betul. Mereka juga dilatih menggunakan teknik pengecaman suku kata pertama dan kedua untuk menyebut perkataan panjang, kemahiran yang didapati terus diaplikasikan dalam ujian pasca.

Hasil temu bual daripada seorang bapa mengakui, *"saya sendiri tak pandai sangat membaca, jadi susah nak ajar anak di rumah"*, manakala seorang ibu pula menyebut *"anak saya lepas sekolah biasanya main saja, saya pula sibuk kerja kilang syif malam, tak sempat tengok latihan dia."* (Ibu bapa 6)

Guru pemulihan menyifatkan hasil yang dicapai sebagai *"luar biasa kerana murid pemulihan biasanya perlu bertahun-tahun untuk capai ke tahap ini, tapi mereka ni nampaknya lebih yakin dan termotivasi belajar selepas balik dari program"*.

Ibu bapa juga turut mendapat pendedahan kerana terlibat dalam program usrah in Action dan Edupelancongan. Mereka menyatakan "Menariknya, program ini, kerana ibu bapa juga turut didedahkan dengan aktiviti membaca anak-anak di rumah menggunakan modul yang disediakan.

Jadi mereka turut membantu anak-anak untuk menguasai kemahiran asas bagi melayakkan diri anak-anak mereka untuk menyertai program Edupelancongan di UIA dalam Usrah in Action 2 nanti. Semasa sesi refleksi pada hari terakhir program, ibu bapa berpeluang melihat sendiri kemampuan anak-anak mereka membaca di hadapan khalayak. Ramai ibu bapa terharu dan gembira hingga ada yang menitiskan air mata melihat anak mereka maju. Seorang bapa menyatakan *"Baru saya tahu anak saya boleh membaca, selama ni ingat dia tak ada harapan. Lepas ni saya nak cuba cari buku cerita untuk ajar dia di rumah."* Komitmen sebegini daripada ibu bapa selepas melihat keberhasilan program amat positif untuk kesinambungan literasi di rumah.

Dapatan temu bual mendalam dengan 8 orang ibu bapa murid pemulihan mendedahkan tiga tema utama berkaitan kesan pelaksanaan Usrah in Action dan Edupelancongan terhadap literasi anak-anak mereka berdasarkan tema-tema berikut:

### 4.3 Tema 1: Peningkatan Minat Membaca di Rumah

Sebahagian besar ibu bapa melaporkan bahawa anak-anak mereka menunjukkan minat baharu untuk membaca selepas menyertai aktiviti. Seorang ibu menyatakan, "Dulu anak saya susah nak baca buku. Selepas ikut program usrah dia sendiri minta saya belikan buku cerita" (Ibu bapa 4).

Bapa dan guru melaporkan perubahan positif sikap murid terhadap membaca. Lima daripada ibu bapa menyatakan anak mereka kini secara spontan mengambil buku dan cuba membaca di rumah, sedangkan sebelum ini langsung tidak berminat. Seorang ibu berkongsi, *"Setiap malam lepas balik program tu, dia akan ambil surat khabar lama cuba baca tajuk. Terkejut saya, sebab dulu nak suruh baca buku sekolah pun susah. Cikgu kata jika boleh membaca, kita akan pergi ke UIA"* (Ibu bapa 5).

### 4.4 Tema 2: Sokongan Ibu Bapa dalam Literasi Harian

Ibu bapa juga menekankan perubahan dalam peranan mereka. Mereka lebih aktif membantun anak-anak membaca terutamanya apabila anak berkongsi pengalaman daripada lawatan edupelancongan.

"Masa balik dari lawatan dia cerita pasal pokok yang dia baca kat papan tanda. Saya rasa lebih mudah nak bantu kerana dia kaitkan dengan apa-apa yang dia tengok" (Ibu Bapa 7)

### 4.5 Tema 3: Keyakinan Anak untuk Membaca Lantang

Ibu bapa mengamati peningkatan keyakinan anak untuk membaca di hadapan ahli keluarga.
Seorang bapa berkata:

"Sekarang dia berani baca doa atau cerita depan adik-adiknya. Dulu dia pemalu sangat. Alhamdulillah ketiga-tiga anak kami terus dapat masuk kelas arus perdana. Ketiga-tiga masuk kelas pemulihan disebabkan mereka lahir tidak cukup bulan. Saya rasa bersyukur sangat setelah mereka menyertai program *Usrah in Action di sekolah* dan Edupelancongan di Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia" (Ibu bapa 2).

Secara keseluruhannya, dapatan kuantitatif yang kukuh (peningkatan skor literasi) disokong oleh bukti kualitatif bahawa program gabungan *Usrah in Action* dan edupelancongan telah membawa impak besar kepada murid dari segi kemahiran, motivasi dan sikap. Tiada murid yang menunjukkan kemerosotan; semua mencatat kemajuan pada kadar berbeza-beza. Perbezaan pencapaian sedikit sebanyak wujud, misalnya murid yang lebih aktif semasa program cenderung mencapai tahap lebih tinggi (K30 ke atas), sementara yang pemalu kekal di tahap pertengahan namun tiada murid yang tertinggal di tahap paling rendah (K1-K10) selepas program kecuali seorang murid calon Kelas Pendidikan Khas tidak melepasi K1. Hal ini menandakan intervensi berjaya mencapai objektif untuk meningkatkan tahap literasi asas kesemua peserta.

Peningkatan Literasi Pasca-Intervensi dalam Objektif 2 menunjukkan selepas menyertai program *Usrah in Action 1 (Ujian Pra) dan Usrah in Action 2 serta aktiviti* Edupelancongan (Ujian Pasca) selama 2 semester, kesemua murid menunjukkan peningkatan yang amat memberangsangkan dalam ujian pasca literasi. Purata skor literasi pasca meningkat kepada 72.7 %, berbanding hanya 9% dalam ujian pra. Peningkatan purata sebanyak 63.7% ini jauh melebihi jangkaan awal. Dari segi tahap rubrik, 17 orang murid berjaya melonjak ke kategori K25 hingga K32, iaitu tahap kemahiran membaca tertinggi dalam kelas pemulihan (mampu membaca perenggan mudah dan memahami makna teks) serta memperoleh markah penuh 50/50 dalam ujian saringan satu pencapaian yang luar biasa memandangkan sebelum ini mereka berada pada tahap asas K1 hingga K5. Baki 7 orang murid yang lain mencapai tahap pertengahan K15 hingga K24 (boleh membaca ayat kompleks dengan bantuan minimum). Secara individu, beberapa orang murid menunjukkan transformasi yang ketara. Contohnya, seorang murid lelaki (A) yang pada awalnya hanya dapat mengenal huruf vokal dan konsonan terbatas, selepas program mampu membaca buku cerita pendek 12 muka surat dengan sedikit bantuan. Seorang murid perempuan (B) yang sebelum ini pasif dan langsung tidak minat membaca buku, kini dilaporkan berani menyertai pertandingan bercerita dan aktif dalam kokurikulum Persatuan Bahasa Melayu.

Jelasnya, dapatan ini memperlihatkan bahawa program bukan sahaja memberikan kesan di sekolah, tetapi turut memperkukuh ekologi pembelajaran di rumah dengan peranan ibu bapa sebagai penyokong utama dalam perkembangan literasi anak. Motivasi dan minat membaca serta kemahiran teknikal membaca anak-anak bertambah apabila menggunakan modul "Kaedah Membaca Pantas" yang dilengkapkan semasa program menunjukkan murid telah menguasai banyak kemahiran asas membaca.

## 5. PERBINCANGAN

Dapatan kajian sebelum intervensi mengesahkan kewujudan masalah serius dalam literasi murid luar bandar, selari dengan trend kebangsaan yang dibangkitkan oleh Kementerian Pendidikan.

Faktor kekangan sosioekonomi dan kurangnya sokongan pendidikan di rumah jelas menjadi punca utama. Seperti yang diutarakan oleh Chen et al. (2020), keluarga berpendapatan rendah sering tidak mempunyai masa, sumber atau keupayaan untuk menumpukan perhatian kepada pembelajaran anak di rumah. Dalam kajian ini menunjukkan, ramai ibu bapa peserta berpendidikan rendah dan bekerja dalam sektor tidak formal, menjadikan perhatian kepada kerja sekolah anak bukan keutamaan. Hal ini menyebabkan murid luar bandar bergantung sepenuhnya kepada pihak sekolah untuk pembelajaran literasi. Namun, sistem persekolahan arus perdana mungkin kurang bersesuaian bagi murid yang tertinggal jauh. Contohnya, silibus Bahasa Melayu Tahun 1 kini agak tinggi dan mencabar bagi murid tanpa asas membaca sejak prasekolah (Yahaya, 2025). Faktor bilangan murid ramai per kelas (ratio guru:murid tinggi) di sekolah luar bandar juga menyukarkan guru memberi intervensi individu. Dapatan kajian mendapati murid kekal pada tahap literasi rendah sehingga Tahun 5 kerana tidak mendapat perhatian khusus sehinggalah penyelidik membawa intervensi tambahan. Penemuan ini menekankan keperluan strategi pendekatan setempat (*locality-specific approach*) seperti yang dicadangkan oleh ahli Parlimen Pokok Sena, Dato' Ahmad Yahaya iaitu menyesuaikan kurikulum dan intervensi mengikut lokaliti luar bandar bagi meningkatkan literasi murid B40. Program yang dijalankan dalam kajian ini boleh dilihat sebagai satu contoh pendekatan setempat tersebut kerana dirangka khusus mengambil kira kekangan murid Pagoh dan melibatkan sumber komuniti terdekat (kampus UIAM Pagoh).

Peningkatan dramatik literasi pasca program menunjukkan bahawa gabungan bimbingan intensif sukarelawan dan pengalaman pembelajaran kontekstual adalah intervensi yang sangat berkesan. Hasil dapatan menunjukkan antara faktor keberkesanan program *Usrah in Action* dan Edupelancongan adalah kerana bimbingan secara individu dan sokongan emosional yang telah diberikan oleh sukarelawan UIAM. Hampir setiap murid pemulihan dalam program ini mendapat perhatian *one-to-one* daripada fasilitator mahasiswa. Dalam tempoh 2 semester hubungan rapat terjalin di mana murid berasa selesa dan berani cuba membaca tanpa takut diejek. Para fasilitator *Usrah in Action* dilatih dengan sikap penyayang dan sabar, sesuai dengan konsep *mahabbah* dalam Islam. Sokongan emosional ini amat penting untuk murid pemulihan yang lazimnya mempunyai konsep diri akademik yang rendah. Kajian terdahulu menunjukkan bahawa *mentoring* berasaskan komuniti dapat meningkatkan keyakinan dan prestasi akademik murid lemah. Hasil dapatan kualitatif kajian menyokong hujah kajian (Markus et al., 1993) dan murid melaporkan rasa *"dihargai dan yakin boleh belajar"* selepas menerima dorongan daripada abang dan kakak sukarelawan. Malah, kesediaan mahasiswa meluangkan masa secara sukarela memberikan contoh teladan yang baik, menginspirasikan murid untuk berubah.

Komponen edupelancongan dalam program ini juga merupakan pendekatan kontekstual yang menjadikan pembelajaran literasi satu pengembaraan yang menarik. Murid tidak lagi terperap di sekolah sahaja dengan buku teks semata-mata, sebaliknya mereka belajar melalui aktiviti interaktif seperti permainan bahasa, lawatan ke perpustakaan, dan permainan mencari harta karun. Hal ini menukarkan imej membaca daripada tugas membosankan kepada aktiviti menyeronokkan. Teori pembelajaran konstruktivis menyatakan bahawa kanak-kanak belajar lebih efektif apabila mereka terlibat aktif membina pengetahuan melalui pengalaman sendiri. Dalam program ini, apabila murid berjaya menyelesaikan pencarian huruf atau membaca papan tanda sebenar di sekitar kampus, mereka merasai rasa pencapaian yang tinggi seterusnya menguatkan lagi minat untuk terus belajar. Tambahan pula, perubahan persekitaran, dari bilik darjah di sekolah ke kawasan kampus di universiti berfungsi sebagai rangsangan baru yang dapat meningkatkan tumpuan murid. Mereka merasakan lawatan ini istimewa dan tidak mahu melepaskan peluang, lalu kerjasama yang amat baik sepanjang program. Hasil ini selari dengan dapatan Yfantidou dan Goulimaris (2018) bahawa edupelancongan mampu meningkatkan penglibatan pelajar dan memberikan pengalaman pembelajaran yang mendalam berbanding dengan kaedah konvensional.

Satu keunikan program *Usrah in Action* dapat menyuntik elemen kerohanian dalam aktiviti untuk meningkatkan motivasi murid. Sepanjang program, mahasiswa sering mengaitkan usaha belajar sebagai satu ibadah. Misalnya sebelum memulakan sesi dengan doa, memberikan kata-kata perangsang bahawa *"Allah suka orang yang menuntut ilmu"* dan menceritakan kisah inspirasi tokoh Islam yang gigih membaca. Pendekatan ini berjaya menyentuh hati murid dan memberikan makna lebih besar kepada aktiviti membaca, bukan sekadar untuk lulus peperiksaan tetapi sebagai amalan yang baik. Hal ini memenuhi keperluan emosi dan rohani murid, menyebabkan mereka lebih terbuka menerima ilmu. Dalam temu bual bersama dengan ibu bapa murid pemulihan, mereka menyatakan rasa kesyukuran kerana program ini telah mengubah sikap anak-anak mereka. Mereka bukan sahaja berusaha keras untuk membaca buku-buku bahasa Melayu tetapi berusaha untuk dan berdoa agar mereka boleh membaca al-Quran. Hal ini menunjukkan integrasi literasi dengan nilai Islam telah menambah motivasi intrinsik murid ke arah literasi bukan sahaja sekular membaca buku sekolah tetapi juga literasi agama berusaha untuk membaca al-Quran. Apabila sukarelawan mengaitkan aktiviti mendidik dengan *ibadah*, hal ini dapat menginspirasikan komuniti untuk turut menghargai ilmu sebagai sebahagian daripada kehidupan beragama. Justeru, impak program bukan sekadar akademik bahkan membentuk sikap positif menyeluruh. Dapatan ini juga menyokong dapatan kajian Sahri et al. (2016).

Program jalinan kerjasama antara universiti dengan sekolah ini juga membuktikan manfaat kolaborasi antara institusi pengajian tinggi dengan sekolah tempatan. Pihak universiti menyediakan sumber manusia iaitu mahasiswa terlatih dan pensyarah pakar serta fasiliti seperti ruang pembelajaran dan bahan bacaan yang mungkin tidak terdapat di sekolah luar bandar. Pihak sekolah pula, membekalkan konteks dan sasaran intervensi. Hasilnya, murid mendapat akses kepada pengalaman pembelajaran yang melangkaui kemampuan sekolah. Dari sudut polisi pendidikan, kerjasama sebegini menyokong matlamat *"komuniti pembelajaran"* yang lebih luas. Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi dan Kementerian Pendidikan boleh memainkan peranan menggalakkan universiti angkat untuk sekolah pedalaman. Seperti yang dinyatakan dalam kerangka *Quadruple Helix* (penyepaduan kerajaan, universiti, industri, komuniti) oleh Md Hasim et al. (2015), penglibatan pelbagai pihak mampu memberikan penyelesaian inovatif kepada masalah literasi luar bandar. Kajian ini memberi contoh model *University-Community Engagement* yang berjaya: UIAM Pagoh sebagai institusi tinggi setempat memikul tanggungjawab sosial membantu meningkatkan pendidikan komuniti sekeliling (Pagoh). Pendekatan bersepadu ini wajar diteruskan dan diperluas.

Dapatan kajian ini didapati konsisten dengan beberapa kajian lepas. Di peringkat antarabangsa, program *service learning* dilaporkan dapat meningkatkan pencapaian akademik pelajar dan sikap terhadap pembelajaran. Program literasi yang melibatkan sukarelawan sebagai tutor juga menunjukkan kejayaan di banyak tempat, contohnya *Projek BacaBaca* di Sabah yang menggunakan sukarelawan belia untuk mengajar membaca anak-anak kampung telah membantu ramai kanak-kanak menguasai 3M (Letchamanan, 2024). Sumbangan unik kajian ini ialah pengintegrasian elemen edupelancongan, yang kurang dilaporkan dalam konteks literasi. Berbanding dengan intervensi biasa di sekolah sahaja, pendekatan membawa murid keluar ke universiti memberikan dimensi pengalaman baharu. Program ini bukan sahaja meningkatkan literasi, malah membuka minda murid kepada aspirasi pendidikan lebih tinggi, seperti yang tercermin apabila murid menyatakan cita-cita ke universiti. Program ini ada persamaan dengan kajian oleh Hematian et al. (2017) di Iran yang mendapati lawatan ke kampus boleh menaikkan motivasi pelajar sekolah menengah untuk melanjutkan pelajaran.

Walau bagaimanapun, perlu diakui terdapat kekangan. Oleh sebab, program ini bersifat intensif jangka masa pendek, soal kekalan impak jangka panjang belum dapat dipastikan melalui kajian ini sahaja. Peningkatan mendadak yang dicatat mungkin akan beransur menurun sekiranya murid kembali ke rutin lama tanpa susulan. Kajian ini tidak mempunyai kumpulan kawalan, justeru tidak dapat menolak sepenuhnya kemungkinan faktor luaran lain yang turut menyumbang (contoh: kematangan semula jadi murid, perhatian tambahan daripada guru selepas program kerana tumpuan publisiti). Namun, kombinasi bukti kuantitatif dan kualitatif dalam kajian ini memberikan keyakinan bahawa intervensi inilah pemangkin perubahan terbesar.

Hasil kajian ini membawa beberapa implikasi penting. Pertama, model intervensi kolaboratif patut dijadikan sebahagian daripada strategi meningkatkan literasi murid di luar bandar. Pihak kementerian boleh memperkenalkan program berskala besar yang menghubungkan universiti dengan sekolah rendah di luar bandar secara sistematik, contohnya melalui inisiatif *Sekolah Angkat Universiti*. Kedua, modul pembelajaran seperti "Kaedah Membaca Pantas" terbukti sesuai untuk murid pemulihan dan boleh diperluas penggunaannya dengan latihan kepada guru-guru pemulihan di sekolah lain. Ketiga, penglibatan ibu bapa perlu diarusperdanakan melalui komponen program yang melatih ibu bapa kaedah mudah membantu anak membaca di rumah, supaya keberlanjutan hasil intervensi lebih terjamin. Dari sudut penyelidikan, kajian lanjutan disarankan untuk menilai kesan jangka panjang program ini, contohnya menjejak prestasi murid-murid ini dalam tempoh 6 bulan hingga setahun akan datang.

## 6. KESIMPULAN

Kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa literasi Bahasa Melayu dalam kalangan murid luar bandar boleh dipertingkatkan dengan ketara melalui intervensi inovatif yang menggabungkan pendekatan edupelancongan dan sukarelawan berasaskan Islam. Pada awal kajian, murid-murid di Pagoh dikenal pasti berada pada tahap literasi yang amat rendah akibat faktor-faktor sosioekonomi dan kekangan persekitaran pembelajaran. Namun, melalui program *Usrah in Action* di mana mahasiswa universiti berganding bahu membimbing murid dalam suasana pembelajaran kontekstual interaktif, murid-murid tersebut berjaya mengejar ketinggalan. Objektif kajian telah tercapai: tahap literasi murid meningkat dengan signifikan (dari K1 kepada K32 bagi sebahagian murid, iaitu peningkatan ke tahap literasi tertinggi pemulihan), dan program intervensi terbukti berkesan memperbaik kemahiran membaca dan membina motivasi serta keyakinan diri murid. Dapatan ini menguatkan lagi hujah bahawa kerjasama antara institusi pendidikan tinggi dengan sekolah merupakan pendekatan strategik yang boleh memberikan impak besar kepada pembangunan pendidikan komuniti luar bandar. Sokongan sukarelawan yang berteraskan nilai murni dan keilmuan, apabila digabung dengan pengalaman pembelajaran yang menyeronokkan, telah menghasilkan model intervensi literasi yang holistik.

Dari perspektif yang lebih luas, usaha meningkatkan literasi bukan tanggungjawab sekolah semata-mata, tetapi menuntut penglibatan pelbagai pihak seperti universiti, ibu bapa, komuniti dan pembuat dasar. Program *Usrah in Action* dan edupelancongan di Pagoh ini boleh dijadikan teladan bagaimana sinergi sedemikian mampu mengubah nasib murid-murid yang tercicir. Dengan mengambil iktibar daripada kejayaan ini, disarankan agar lebih banyak program seumpamanya dilaksanakan di kawasan luar bandar lain, disesuaikan mengikut keperluan setempat. Pihak berwajib juga perlu memastikan sokongan susulan (seperti kelas tambahan berkala atau penyediaan bahan bacaan percuma) agar momentum peningkatan literasi dapat dikekalkan.

Kajian ini tidak terlepas daripada beberapa kekangan praktikal. Antara cabaran utama adalah isu kekurangan akses kepada peranti digital dan capaian Internet dalam kalangan murid luar bandar. Kekangan ini telah diatasi sebahagiannya melalui inisiatif kerajaan seperti Program Jaringan Prihatin yang menyediakan bantuan peranti dan data kepada keluarga B40 (Kementerian Kewangan Malaysia, 2021). Dalam konteks projek Pagoh, pihak universiti menyediakan kemudahan tambahan seperti pinjaman peranti dan penggunaan infrastruktur kampus bagi memastikan kelancaran aktiviti literasi.

Sebagai kesimpulan, membina budaya literasi dalam kalangan murid luar bandar memerlukan inovasi, kolaborasi dan keprihatinan. Apabila mahasiswa, guru, ibu bapa dan komuniti berganding bahu, serta murid didedahkan kepada pengalaman pembelajaran yang bermakna, potensi diri mereka dapat dicungkil sepenuhnya. Program ini membuktikan bahawa dengan pendekatan yang betul, tiada murid yang "tidak boleh diajar". Setiap anak mempunyai kebolehan untuk celik huruf dan cemerlang, asalkan diberikan peluang dan bimbingan yang bersesuaian. Semoga model *Usrah in Action* dan edupelancongan ini menjadi pencetus kepada lebih banyak usaha berterusan dalam memartabatkan literasi dan pendidikan untuk semua, sejajar dengan agenda Pendidikan untuk Kelestarian dan Matlamat Pembangunan Mampan (SDG4: Pendidikan Berkualiti) di negara kita. Selain itu, kejayaan program ini menyokong agenda global *Matlamat Pembangunan Mampan (SDG4: Pendidikan Berkualiti)* yang menekankan pendidikan inklusif dan saksama untuk semua (United Nations, 2023). Pada masa yang sama, program seperti ini turut sejajar dengan matlamat pembelajaran UIAM yang berpaksikan *Sejahtera Academic Framework*, iaitu melahirkan graduan berilmu, berakhlak dan berbakti kepada masyarakat (IIUM, 2021). Justeru, model ini boleh dijadikan pencetus kepada usaha berterusan dalam memartabatkan literasi dan pendidikan untuk semua, khususnya dalam konteks komuniti luar bandar.

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ARTICLE

JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY
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# Mobile Applications and Tourist Loyalty in Malaysia: A Comparative Case Study of Malaysia Airlines and AirAsia

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## ABSTRACT

In today's globalised world, mobile platforms have become indispensable, especially in tourism, where travel applications enhance efficiency and convenience. Yet, despite their potential, airline mobile applications face persistent challenges such as low user engagement, limited utilisation, and minimal adoption for flight bookings. This study explores how the attributes of airline mobile applications influence tourist loyalty within the Malaysian context. Employing a quantitative approach, the research analyses patterns of tourist loyalty in relation to the use of airline mobile applications. The findings identify five key attributes shaping loyalty: user experience, usability, interface design, security features, and system compatibility. These characteristics show significant positive relationships with tourist loyalty, with some exerting stronger influence than others. The study offers important practical implications for airlines and tourism stakeholders by emphasising the strategic design of mobile applications that prioritise these attributes to strengthen customer retention. By optimising application features, airlines can enhance user engagement and increase the adoption of mobile bookings in the Malaysian market. This research also contributes to the literature on tourism and mobile technologies by providing empirical evidence on the direct impact of mobile application attributes on tourist loyalty in a developing aviation market. It highlights the need for well-designed, secure and user-friendly platforms to meet travellers'

expectations and sustain competitive advantage in an increasingly digitalised tourism environment.

Keywords: Airline mobile applications; Consumer loyalty; Mobile applications attributes; Mobile usability; User experience design

Article Classification: Research Paper

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Airlines and other businesses have adapted mobile technology to offer customers greater control over their service experience and to develop offerings tailored to individual needs. Through airline mobile applications, consumers can separate the moment of purchase from consumption, enhancing convenience during pre-travel stages. Globally, airlines have increasingly encouraged customers to use mobile applications for tasks traditionally handled by service personnel, such as check-in, flight status updates, and boarding pass generation. According to the International Air Transport Association (2024), 71% of travellers now book their journeys online or through a mobile application, with more than half preferring to use the airline’s website or app. Mobile applications and websites have become the most common reservation platforms (Travelport Digital, 2019). Furthermore, 32% of travellers want all travel information consolidated in one place before departure, and convenience remains the main factor influencing their choice of payment method (International Air Transport Association, 2024). These patterns signal a sustained shift towards digital self-service, supported by growing expectations for speed, transparency, and personalisation in airline service delivery.

While online travel agency (OTA) applications aim to provide a one-stop platform for booking flights, hotels, rental cars, and other services (Phocuswright, 2021), airline-specific mobile applications are more focused on flight-related services such as status updates, in-flight entertainment, and baggage tracking (Wang *et al.*, 2018; Benckendorff *et al.*, 2019). OTA apps are often perceived as offering more comprehensive services and competitive prices by aggregating multiple airlines and services (Phocuswright, 2021). Furthermore, OTA apps' features are more user-friendly and streamlined interfaces, whereas airline apps can sometimes be cluttered or less intuitive (Zhang, 2021).

Despite the advantages of mobile technology, adoption rates for travel apps remain limited. Gelfeld (2017) reported that more than half of tourists preferred not to use travel apps, and only a small percentage used mobile phones to book vacations or flight tickets (Kemmis, 2022). Many travellers are reluctant to download travel apps due to infrequent usage (Benady & Hadwick, 2016), while poor user experiences such as slow loading times, complex navigation, and limited personalisation further discourage engagement (Dickinson *et al.*, 2015). Restricted functionality, where apps offer only basic services like flight booking, may reduce competitiveness compared to platforms offering multiple travel options (Egger *et al.*, 2020). In addition, the abundance of alternative apps and websites makes travellers hesitant to commit to a single platform (Sia *et al.*, 2023).

In Malaysia, internet penetration reached 97.7% in early 2025 (34.9 million users), with mobile connections exceeding the total population at 121%, indicating broad access to mobile technology (Kemp, 2025). Among users aged 16–64, 98.5% owned a mobile device, with popular online activities including downloading apps, shopping, and social media (Howe, 2024). The government has also promoted digital literacy and e-commerce skills (Othman *et al.*, 2021). Yet, despite this high digital readiness, the uptake of airline mobile applications remains inconsistent, and their role in fostering consumer loyalty is still underexplored. This gap is critical, as poor usability, limited features, or weak interface design may discourage repeat use and push travellers towards OTA platforms, which often provide more integrated and competitive services.

While global studies have examined mobile app adoption, there is limited empirical evidence focusing on the Malaysian airline sector, particularly regarding how specific app attributes influence behavioural engagement and purchase intention. This lack of contextual research makes it difficult for airlines to design applications that effectively build and sustain loyalty. Therefore, this study investigates the attributes of airline mobile applications, including user experience, usability, user interface, security, and compatibility, and examines how these factors influence tourists' loyalty in Malaysia. By addressing this gap, the study offers both academic contributions and practical insights for airlines seeking to improve mobile app strategies and strengthen long-term customer relationships.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Mobile Travel Services

The rapid advancement of mobile technologies has fundamentally transformed travel planning and booking processes. Mobile devices such as smartphones now enable travellers to access a wide range of services, including flight searches, hotel reservations, and itinerary management, with increasing convenience (Ho *et al.*, 2021). Industry reports show steady growth in mobile travel service adoption as users prioritise real-time accessibility and on-the-go functionality (Market.us, 2025). As mobile platforms continue to evolve, their integration into tourism is expected to deepen, further reshaping traveller expectations and behaviours (Kim & Kim, 2017).

These mobile travel services are delivered through multiple channels, each catering to different user needs. Web-based platforms provide browser-accessible travel solutions optimised for mobile devices (Schmidt-belz *et al.*, 2002), while email-based services deliver booking confirmations, promotional offers, and itinerary updates (Knowles & Westcott, 2021). However, mobile applications, particularly airline applications, have emerged as the most comprehensive solution, offering personalised features such as real-time flight updates, digital boarding passes, and in-app rebooking options (Kim & Kim, 2017). This multi-channel approach ensures travellers can manage their journeys seamlessly across different touchpoints.

The global mobile travel market has experienced exponential growth, reflecting the increasing reliance on digital solutions. Recent industry analyses estimate the market's value at $424 billion by 2020, with the Asia-Pacific and European regions driving much of this expansion (Phocuswright, 2021). Studies further reveal that mobile devices now dominate the entire travel journey, from initial destination research to post-trip reviews (Phocuswright, 2021). This shift reflects the central role of mobile platforms in modern tourism, as travellers increasingly expect instant access to information and services.

Mobile travel services have also influenced consumer decision-making and travel patterns, proving their role beyond convenience. Research indicates that the ease of mobile bookings can reduce price sensitivity, particularly for flight purchases (Islam *et al.*, 2010). However, adoption rates vary significantly across regions due to geographic, cultural, and infrastructural factors (Bouwman *et al.*, 2012). Studies on other mobile services, such as location-based mobile services, further demonstrate that user experiences shape expectations, leading to demand for more precise and context-aware functionalities (Schmidt-belz *et al.*, 2002). These findings highlight the transformative impact of mobile services on tourism, while also acknowledging the need for continued innovation to meet diverse traveller needs.

Additional research in the Malaysian context reinforces this point. The i-Suyyah mobile application, developed for Arab tourists in Malaysia, demonstrated that strong usability directly improves satisfaction and engagement, highlighting usability as a key determinant of mobile app success (Daud *et al.*, 2021). Similarly, the adoption of mobile wallets in Malaysia has been found to depend on levels of trust and the strength of supporting infrastructure, which in turn shape perceived ease of use and usefulness (Lui & Zainuldin, 2025). These findings illustrate that, beyond accessibility, factors such as usability and trust are essential in encouraging the adoption and sustained use of mobile travel applications, a consideration particularly relevant to airline apps where convenience and security expectations are high.

### 2.2 Travel Consumption through Mobile Applications

Mobile travel applications have transformed travel consumption patterns across all stages of the journey. Travellers increasingly use these apps for destination research, comparing flights and hotels, and accessing peer reviews, fundamentally changing pre-trip planning behaviours (Lee & Kim, 2023). The convenience of mobile apps has similarly altered consumption during travel, streamlining arrangements and providing real-time information (Sia *et al.*, 2023). Post-trip engagement has also evolved, with travellers frequently using apps to share experiences through photos and reviews, thereby influencing both the industry and future travellers (Bhinder, 2025).

The purchasing process through mobile travel applications exemplifies the sector's growth of mobile commerce (m-commerce). Users typically browse options, select itineraries, and complete transactions via various payment methods before receiving electronic confirmations (Phocuswright, 2021). Between 2019 and 2023, global revenue from travel apps more than tripled (Statista Research, 2024), and total global downloads are projected to surpass 2 billion in 2024, with app revenues reaching about $180 million (Rui Ma, 2024). Purchasing behaviours differ between platforms, with online travel apps serving broader audiences with comprehensive services like trip planning, while airline apps cater to frequent flyers with flight-specific features (Parise *et al.*, 2016).

Consumer preferences for mobile shopping are shaped by several key factors, including convenience, trust, and personalisation, which significantly influence purchasing decisions (Groß, 2015). Streamlined checkout processes particularly enhance conversion rates, reflecting the broader shift towards mobile-first consumption where apps have become the preferred channel for browsing and booking travel services (Groß, 2015). Airline mobile applications serve as essential tools for travellers to manage itineraries, modify bookings, and access real-time flight updates, offering significantly greater convenience than traditional desktop platforms (Budd & Vorley, 2013; Joshi *et al.*, 2024). These applications enhance customer satisfaction through personalised experiences, with their effectiveness largely dependent on thoughtful design implementation (Budd & Vorley, 2013).

The success of travel applications is reflected in three key design principles: utility, usability, and novelty, which collectively enhance competitive advantage and product performance (Chang, 2015; Lee *et al.*, 2011). These elements correspond to fundamental technological characteristics, which are compatibility, complexity, and relative advantages, directly influencing user perception and experience (Lee *et al.*, 2011). Superior design not only differentiates products in competitive markets but also increases recommendation likelihood and user satisfaction (Lee *et al.*, 2011). Consequently, understanding these design qualities becomes critical, as they determine how effectively an application meets both non-functional requirements and core functional needs.

Prior research also supports the link between consumption and loyalty, particularly in relation to service quality and personalisation. In the hospitality sector, studies have shown that mobile applications delivering personalised features enhance customer engagement and strengthen emotional connections with brands (Yeo *et al.*, 2024). Within the airline industry, service quality and price remain central drivers of satisfaction and loyalty. Mahmud *et al.* (2013) found that passengers' satisfaction with service and pricing significantly influenced their loyalty, while Nadiri *et al.* (2008) reported that quality perceptions directly shaped repeat patronage in the airline sector. These studies suggest that mobile app-based consumption in airlines is not just a matter of convenience but reflects travellers' broader perceptions of service quality and fairness, both of which play a decisive role in strengthening or weakening loyalty.

### 2.3 Loyalty towards Airline Applications

Loyalty in mobile travel applications manifests through measurable user engagement and purchasing behaviours, demonstrating both perceived value and satisfactory user experiences (Lee & Kim, 2023). These loyalty indicators extend to information-seeking activities, community participation, and experience-sharing features within applications (Lee & Kim, 2023). The combination of recommendation, positive word-of-mouth, and purchase frequency collectively establishes reliable metrics for assessing app loyalty (Kim *et al.*, 2016). Such loyalty dynamics prove particularly valuable in travel applications where user retention directly influences revenue generation through repeat bookings and service expansions (Kim & Kim, 2017).

The fundamental concept of customer loyalty reflects the probability of repeat consumption with a company, shaped by satisfaction levels, service quality, and perceived value (Kim & Kim, 2017). Within mobile travel contexts, application usability and interface design significantly affect loyalty by shaping the overall booking experience (Kim & Kim, 2017). Contemporary research characterises loyalty through both behavioural patterns of repeat purchases and attitudinal preferences for specific brands (Foster & Cadogan, 2000). This dual perspective recognises that loyal customers resist competitor approaches and actively promote their preferred brands through recommendations and additional purchases (Griffin, 2009; Kotler & Keller, 2009).

The digital marketplace amplifies loyalty's importance, where customer retention demonstrates greater cost-efficiency than new customer acquisition (Deng *et al.*, 2010). Within mobile commerce environments, loyal users generate sustained revenue while reducing marketing expenditures, resulting in service providers implementing retention strategies, including device upgrades and bonus services (Eshghi *et al.*, 2007). Comprehensive loyalty encompasses repurchase intentions, willingness to recommend, price tolerance, and engagement with additional product lines (Chang & Fong, 2010) . For the present study, mobile application loyalty is defined as users' long-term commitment to their current service platform combined with their propensity to recommend it to others (Reichheld & Schefter, 2000)**.**

Recent research has expanded the understanding of loyalty dynamics within the aviation sector. Bastari *et al.*(2023) found that advertising on platforms such as Instagram significantly influenced satisfaction and loyalty among low-cost airline passengers. Likewise, social media feedback has been shown to be a valuable tool for airlines to evaluate performance and identify weaknesses. For instance, Saad et al. (2023) applied Twitter sentiment analysis to AirAsia and revealed mixed perceptions of service quality after COVID-19, while Fan and Niu (2016) demonstrated that service recovery strategies deployed through social media could directly affect consumer perceptions of loyalty. Furthermore, Iris and Nagalingham (2023) highlighted how business intelligence solutions implemented in United Airlines leveraged passenger feedback and digital data to refine loyalty strategies. In addition, research on brand app usability indicates that cross-channel features mediate the relationship between offline service satisfaction and app recommendations, ultimately strengthening consumer loyalty in the airline industry (Chen et al., 2020). Collectively, these findings suggest that loyalty through mobile apps cannot be seen in isolation but must be analysed within a broader digital ecosystem of usability, social engagement, and brand integration.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design with purposive sampling. The participants were required to have prior experience using both the Malaysia Airlines App and the AirAsia Super App, as these represent the two most widely used airline applications in Malaysia. A total of 100 valid responses were collected, comprising 32 males and 68 females. The majority of respondents were from Generation Z (aged 10–25 years, n = 92), while the remainder were from Generation Y (aged 26–41 years, n = 6) and Generation X (aged 42–57 years, n = 2).

The research instrument was a structured questionnaire, developed based on validated scales from previous studies to ensure construct validity. The questionnaire consisted of three sections: (i) demographic information, (ii) perceptions of airline app attributes covering five constructs (user experience, usability, user interface, security, and compatibility), and (iii) measures of loyalty through two constructs, behavioural engagement and purchase intention. All items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). Data collection was conducted through both online distribution and face-to-face administration in order to maximise response rates within the given time constraints. Respondents were informed of the purpose of the study and provided consent before participating.

For data analysis, descriptive statistics were applied to profile respondents and summarise mean scores for both airline applications. A paired sample t-test was employed to examine whether observed differences in attribute ratings and loyalty measures between the two apps were statistically significant, with the significance level set at $p < 0.05$. Qualitative data were also obtained from open-ended questions, and thematic coding was used to identify recurring themes. All quantitative analyses were performed using SPSS software.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Respondent Profiles

A total of 100 respondents participated in this study. The demographic breakdown is presented in Table 1, showing both the number of respondents and their respective percentages. The sample was predominantly female, with most respondents belonging to Generation Z (aged 10–25 years). The majority were from Selangor, followed by Johor and Kuala Lumpur, and most were students pursuing tertiary education.

Table 1. Respondents' Profile

| Category | Subcategory | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | Male | 32 | 32 |
| | Female | 68 | 68 |
| **Age** | 10–25 years (Gen Z) | 92 | 92 |
| | 26–41 years (Gen Y) | 6 | 6 |
| | 42–57 years (Gen X) | 2 | 2 |
| | Above 57 years | 0 | 0 |
| **Origin** | Selangor | 28 | 28 |
| | Johor | 15 | 15 |
| | Kuala Lumpur | 12 | 12 |
| | Perak | 9 | 9 |
| | Terengganu | 8 | 8 |
| | Pahang | 7 | 7 |
| | Kelantan | 6 | 6 |
| | Pulau Pinang | 4 | 4 |
| | Sabah, Kedah | 6 | 6 (3+3) |
| | Negeri Sembilan | 2 | 2 |
| | Sarawak, Melaka, Thailand | 3 | 3 (1+1+1) |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Perlis | 0 | 0 |
| **Education** | Secondary | 1 | 1 |
| | Tertiary | 91 | 91 |
| | Postgraduate | 8 | 8 |
| **Employment** | Government sector | 3 | 3 |
| | Private sector | 2 | 2 |
| | Business owner | 1 | 1 |
| | Student | 93 | 93 |
| | Unemployed | 1 | 1 |
| **Marital Status** | Married | 6 | 6 |
| | Single | 94 | 94 |

The respondents were largely young, single, and pursuing higher education, with females forming the majority of the sample. Most participants came from urbanised states, especially Selangor, Johor, and Kuala Lumpur, reflecting the higher concentration of mobile adoption in these regions. The dominance of Gen Z and student respondents suggests that the study primarily captures insights from digitally savvy and mobile-active users, a demographic highly relevant for evaluating airline mobile applications.

### 4.2 Airline Mobile Application Attributes and Consumer Loyalty

A comparative analysis of mean scores was undertaken to evaluate the users' perception towards the attributes of the Malaysia Airlines and the AirAsia Super apps (Table 2). Mean values ranged from 3.22 to 4.18, reflecting generally favourable user perceptions of both platforms.

Table 2. Summary of Mean Score Comparisons of Users' Perception towards Apps Attributes Between Malaysia Airlines App and AirAsia Super App

| Attribute | Item | Higher Mean Score |
|---|---|---|
| **IV1: User Experience** | Enhances travel experience | AirAsia (4.02) |
| | Saves time | Equal (4.11) |
| **IV2: Usability** | Meets travel needs | AirAsia (4.06) |
| | Easy to use | AirAsia (4.13) |
| **IV3: User Interface** | Visual appeal | AirAsia (4.16) |
| | Aesthetic design | AirAsia (4.03) |
| **IV4: Security** | Personal data protection | Malaysia Airlines (3.82) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Privacy & security attributes | AirAsia (3.94) |
| **IV5: Compatibility** | OS compatibility | AirAsia (3.90) |
| **DV1: Behavioural Engagement** | Intend to stay as user | AirAsia (3.97) |
| | Support other members | AirAsia (3.96) |
| **DV2: Purchase Intention** | Willing to buy tickets | Malaysia Airlines (4.18) |
| | Frequent future purchases | AirAsia (4.02) |
| | Reconsider other product purchases | AirAsia (3.55) |
| | Avoid counter purchases | AirAsia (3.29) |

As shown in Table 2, both applications achieved high ratings for user experience (IV1), with similar scores for enhancing the travel experience (M = 3.98 for Malaysia Airlines; M = 4.02 for AirAsia) and identical means for saving time (M = 4.11). In terms of usability (IV2), the AirAsia Super App recorded slightly higher means for meeting travel needs (4.06 vs. 3.99) and ease of use (4.13 vs. 3.95). For user interface (IV3), AirAsia again outperformed Malaysia Airlines in both visual appeal (4.16 vs. 3.98) and aesthetic design (4.03 vs. 3.90). Under security (IV4), Malaysia Airlines had a marginal advantage in personal data protection (3.82 vs. 3.73), while AirAsia scored higher for overall privacy and security attributes (3.94 vs. 3.85). For compatibility (IV5), scores were nearly identical, with a slight edge for AirAsia (3.90 vs. 3.85). In behavioural engagement (DV1), AirAsia consistently recorded higher means, particularly for intention to remain a user (3.97 vs. 3.75) and willingness to support other members (3.96 vs. 3.86). Regarding purchase intention (DV2), both apps scored highly for willingness to buy tickets via the app (4.18 for Malaysia Airlines; 4.17 for AirAsia) and for frequent future purchases (4.02 vs. 3.94). AirAsia also achieved higher ratings for reconsidering other product purchases in the app (3.55 vs. 3.36) and avoiding counter purchases after using the app (3.29 vs. 3.22).

Overall, the comparative results demonstrate that the five app attributes examined, including the user experience, usability, user interface, security, and compatibility, are directly associated with tourists' loyalty outcomes, particularly behavioural engagement and purchase intention. This confirms that the study's research objective has been addressed, as the findings highlight how specific application features shape users' willingness to continue engaging with and purchasing from airline mobile applications in Malaysia.

The descriptive analysis shows that both applications received positive ratings across all measured attributes, with mean scores ranging from 3.22 to 4.18. AirAsia scored higher in most usability, user interface, behavioural engagement, and purchase intention items, while Malaysia Airlines led in specific security measures and willingness to purchase tickets via the app. These results align with existing studies emphasising usability and interface design as critical factors in mobile app adoption (Gao *et al.*, 2013; Wang *et al.*, 2018). The small differences in mean values suggest that both airlines provide competitive mobile platforms; however, AirAsia's advantage lies in its more intuitive and appealing interface. Meanwhile, Malaysia Airlines' stronger security perception could be leveraged as a marketing point to differentiate its app in a market where data protection is increasingly valued.

### 4.3 Differences in Application Attributes and Loyalty between AirAsia and Malaysia Airlines

A paired sample t-test was conducted to compare respondents' evaluations of application attributes and consumer loyalty between the Malaysia Airlines App and the AirAsia Super App. This analysis tested whether the observed differences in mean scores represented genuine variations in user perceptions rather than random fluctuations. The results are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3. Paired Sample t-test Results

| Variables Compared | Mean Difference | SD | t-value | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **IV: Application Attributes – DV: Consumer Loyalty** | -0.0875 | 0.5080 | -1.722 | 0.088 |
| **IV1: User Experience – DV1: Behavioural Engagement** | -0.0700 | 0.5756 | -1.216 | 0.227 |
| **IV1: User Experience – DV2: Purchase Intention** | -0.0520 | 0.5926 | -0.878 | 0.382 |
| **IV2: Usability – DV1: Behavioural Engagement** | -0.1225 | 0.6131 | -1.998 | **0.048** |
| **IV2: Usability – DV2: Purchase Intention** | -0.1045 | 0.6357 | -1.644 | 0.103 |
| **IV3: User Interface – DV1: Behavioural Engagement** | -0.1195 | 0.6085 | -1.964 | 0.052 |
| **IV3: User Interface – DV2: Purchase Intention** | -0.1195 | 0.6085 | -1.964 | 0.052 |
| **IV4: Security – DV1: Behavioural Engagement** | -0.0733 | 0.4814 | -1.524 | 0.131 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **IV4: Security – DV2: Purchase Intention** | -0.0553 | 0.4665 | -1.186 | 0.238 |
| **IV5: Compatibility – DV1: Behavioural Engagement** | -0.0850 | 0.5426 | -1.567 | 0.120 |
| **IV5: Compatibility – DV2: Purchase Intention** | -0.0670 | 0.5673 | -1.181 | 0.240 |

*Note: Significant results (p < 0.05) are in bold.*

The paired t-test analysis found that most attribute–loyalty relationships between the two applications were not statistically significant, except for usability's effect on behavioural engagement (p = 0.048), favouring the AirAsia Super App. This proves that usability is a key determinant of sustained user interaction, consistent with prior research linking ease of navigation and efficient functionality to higher engagement (Dickinson *et al.*, 2015; Egger *et al.*, 2020).

This reflected usability as a key driver of sustained engagement, aligning with the Expectation-Confirmation Theory, which indicated that user satisfaction and continued use are driven by the confirmation of initial expectations (Yao *et al.*, 2025). Given that usability improvements were the only statistically significant differentiator, this suggests that in competitive mobile service environments, incremental gains in ease of use can translate to disproportionate loyalty benefits. The absence of significance for other attributes may indicate that baseline expectations for these features (e.g., security, compatibility) are already met by both airlines, thus reducing their potential as differentiating factors (Gilbert & Wong, 2003; Park *et al.*, 2020).

These results directly support the study's objective by showing that, while most attributes were perceived similarly across the two apps, usability emerged as the most critical differentiator influencing tourists' loyalty. This finding reinforces the importance of app design that prioritises ease of use as a means of sustaining long-term user engagement in Malaysia's airline industry.

### 4.4 Perception of AirAsia and Malaysia Airlines App Performance

The final section of the questionnaire included an open-ended question to gather respondents' views on the performance of the Malaysia Airlines App and the AirAsia Super App, as well as comments and suggestions for improvement. A total of 78 respondents provided feedback, summarised in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of Open-Ended Responses

| Attribute | Malaysia Airlines App – Key Reasons | AirAsia Super App – Key Reasons |
|---|---|---|
| **User Experience** | More convenient; Better experience; Smooth service (6%) | User-friendly; Smoother experience (4%) |
| **Usability** | Smooth booking; More stable (2%) | Booking convenience; More functions; Simple ticket booking; Easier access; Time-saving; Live chat (9%) |
| **User Interface** | Better design; Simpler layout (2%) | Easier navigation; Appealing visuals; Systematic layout; Better UI design (9%) |
| **Security** | Higher trust in MAS (2%) | – |

Feedback revealed no unanimous preference between the two applications, with opinions divided. AirAsia was frequently described as more appealing and feature-rich, particularly in usability and interface design, and respondents highlighted promotional offers as a factor influencing ticket purchases. In contrast, some users preferred Malaysia Airlines for its simpler design, ease of ticket booking, and perceived stability. Fewer respondents cited brand trust and security as reasons for choosing Malaysia Airlines. Several comments also indicated a preference without detailed justification, while others mentioned ticket pricing and brand promotions as deciding factors.

AirAsia's strengths in usability and user interface, identified in the mean score comparisons and the paired t-test analysis, were echoed in open-ended feedback, where respondents frequently mentioned more straightforward navigation, a wider range of functions, and appealing visual design. These attributes align with prior research highlighting that intuitive design and expanded functionality enhance user satisfaction and engagement (Kadaskar, 2024; Liu *et al.*, 2024).

Conversely, some respondents' preference for Malaysia Airlines on the basis of simplicity, stability, and trust reflects the higher score it received for security-related measures in the quantitative analysis. This suggests that while AirAsia may lead in interactivity and features, Malaysia Airlines retains an advantage in perceived reliability and data protection, a factor that can be particularly influential for risk-averse users

(Belanche *et al.*, 2022). The mention of promotions and ticket pricing as drivers for choosing AirAsia also points to an area not directly measured in the survey but potentially influential in shaping loyalty, suggesting that future research could integrate pricing strategy variables alongside application attributes.

These qualitative insights complement the quantitative findings by highlighting how specific app attributes, such as usability, user interface, and security, shape tourists' loyalty behaviours. By capturing user perceptions in their own words, the open-ended responses provide additional evidence that supports the research objective of identifying which mobile application features most strongly influence behavioural engagement and purchase intention in the Malaysian airline context.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study examined the attributes of airline mobile applications and their influence on tourist loyalty in Malaysia, focusing on a comparison between the Malaysia Airlines App and the AirAsia Super App. Quantitative results indicated that both applications were rated positively across all measured attributes, with AirAsia outperforming Malaysia Airlines in most areas related to usability, user interface, and behavioural engagement, while Malaysia Airlines held a marginal advantage in personal data protection and willingness to purchase tickets via the app. Paired sample t-test results confirmed that usability had a statistically significant impact on behavioural engagement, favouring AirAsia, while other attribute–loyalty relationships showed no significant difference. Qualitative feedback supported these findings, with respondents highlighting AirAsia's ease of use, appealing design, and promotional offers, and Malaysia Airlines' simplicity, stability, and perceived trustworthiness.

The findings carry several implications for airline operators in Malaysia. For Malaysia Airlines, improving usability, particularly in navigation, booking processes, and interactive features, could enhance user engagement and close the gap with AirAsia's performance. At the same time, the airline could leverage its perceived strengths in security and trust to attract and retain risk-averse users, positioning these as key differentiators in its marketing strategy. For AirAsia, maintaining its lead in usability and interface design is important, but strengthening data protection measures and communicating these improvements to users could further solidify its competitive position. The role of promotional offers and ticket pricing, highlighted in the qualitative results, also suggests that non-technical factors can significantly influence loyalty and should be integrated into broader mobile engagement strategies.

The study reflected the importance of balancing functional performance, security, and marketing appeal in mobile application design from an industry perspective. As mobile platforms continue to be a primary channel for customer interaction in the airline sector, investing in features that enhance usability and user interface quality can directly impact engagement and purchase behaviours. Meanwhile, maintaining strong privacy and security standards is essential for sustaining trust, especially in an environment where personal data protection is increasingly scrutinised. Future research could expand on these findings by including a larger and more diverse respondent pool, incorporating pricing and promotional factors into the analysis, and examining longitudinal changes in user perceptions over time.

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ARTICLE

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# Examining Budget Hotels from a Muslim-Friendly services perspective in Malaysia: A qualitative approach

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**ABSTRACT**

The global trend of Islamization has increased the demand for Muslim-friendly services in the hospitality sector. As such, Malaysian budget hotels market themselves to attract this lucrative Muslim market. However, there needs to be more research on effective marketing strategies for these hotels, particularly in balancing profitability with the costs of implementing Muslim-friendly services. This is crucial, considering the significant presence of Muslim consumers in the budget hotel segment. This study examined budget hotels in Malaysia from a Muslim-Friendly services perspective. This study used a qualitative approach using in-depth interviews and thematic analysis. This study used an online interview approach involving seven (7) Malaysian informants. The findings of this study involve Malaysian Muslim travellers' preferences in selecting budget hotels across dimensions such as Awareness, Expectation, Brand Loyalty, Communication, and Value for Money. Diverse expectations emerge, from explicit communication to a pragmatic reliance on technology. Cleanliness remains a top priority, considering the cost implications of Muslim-friendly amenities. Brand loyalty balances affordability, quality, and an Islamic image. Effective communication, transparency, and perceived value for money are linked to Muslim-friendly amenities and smartphone usage. The

findings provide actionable insights for the hospitality industry to enhance satisfaction among Malaysian Muslim travellers.

Keywords: Budget hotel; Muslim-Friendly Hotel; Online Interviews; Qualitative

Article Classification: Research Paper

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The growing trend and effort of Islamization in the world's Muslim communities have increased the demand for Muslim-friendly services, including various lodging options that adhere to Islamic standards and guidelines (Battour & Ismail, 2016; Tauhid et al., 2025). In response to this need, budget hotels in countries where Islam is the dominant religion are intensifying their marketing efforts to attract Muslim tourists by positioning themselves as Muslim-friendly and emphasizing the amenities they provide (El-Gohary, 2016; Razzaq et al., 2016). However, more research is needed on how these budget hotels can effectively market their Muslim-friendly services to target Muslim consumers while balancing the need for profitability and the costs associated with implementing and maintaining such services. This is a critical gap because Muslim consumers represent a substantial and growing segment of the global tourism market, including the budget hotel industry.

Therefore, the statement of the problem is as follows: in the context of the growing trend of Islamization in the Muslim world, do budget hotels in Muslim countries effectively market their Muslim-friendly services to attract Muslim travellers while also striking a balance between the need for profitability and the costs associated with implementing and maintaining Muslim-friendly services? Additionally, what are Muslim travellers' attitudes, behaviours, and preferences concerning Muslim-friendly budget hotels in Malaysia?

This study aims to investigate Muslim travellers' attitudes, behaviours, and preferences for Muslim-friendly budget hotels in Malaysia. While the demand for halal tourism and Muslim-friendly hospitality services is rising (Fauzi & Battour, 2024), not many budget hotels in Muslim countries have marketed themselves as Muslim-friendly, and little is known about the efficacy of their marketing strategies in this context (Yusof et al., 2025a, 2025b). This poses a significant challenge for budget hotels, as their management must balance the need to accommodate Muslim travellers' expectations for Sharia-compliant services with the operational costs of maintaining such amenities. By addressing this issue, this research seeks to contribute to the academic literature on Islamic marketing and hospitality management while providing budget hotel operators in Muslim countries, particularly in Malaysia, with actionable insights to enhance their competitiveness in the growing Muslim-friendly tourism market (Sahida et al., 2011).

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Definition and Scope of the Budget Hotel Segment

The literature on budget hotels reveals a distinctive customer profile compared to those opting for full-service and upscale accommodation. Budget hotel customers are recognized for being more value-conscious, reflecting unique lifestyles and consumption attitudes (Ren et al., 2016). In Malaysia, the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC) registered 243 budget hotels as of 2024, with 89 holding a 1-star rating and 154 classified as 2-star establishments. 3-star hotels are typically viewed as offering a slightly more comprehensive range of services and amenities than 1- or 2-star hotels, yet still prioritizing affordability and streamlined operations (Sirirat et al., 2024). Additionally, MOTAC's Orchid Classification Scheme acknowledges accommodation hotels without star ratings that provide basic yet quality facilities, recognizing their contribution to good, safe, and clean accommodations (MOTAC, 2024).

Budget hotels are often labelled as limited-service, no-frill, or economy hotels, defined by their streamlined operations and focus on essential guest needs, such as clean, safe lodging in a convenient location. Critically, the concept is not strictly delineated by a specific star rating but is anchored in the price point and service level offered (Permatasari et al., 2025). This market reality supports the inclusion of 3-star hotels within the budget category when analysing certain markets and guest behaviours. Academic literature and industry practice recognize that segmentation is not homogeneous, and the budget scope can flexibly encompass 1-, 2-, and 3-star properties. For instance, recent studies analysing large data sets often include 3-star hotels in the budget segment, reflecting how guests perceive affordability and value within local pricing structures (Permatasari et al., 2025).

The operational definition of the budget hotel segment in Malaysia extends beyond traditional 1- or 2-star ratings, a scope that is formally recognized by industry representative bodies. Historically focused on properties rated two-star or equivalent and below, the Malaysia Budget & Business Hotel Association (MyBHA) officially broadened its mandate in 2019. The association's revised objective is to represent the common interests and dignify the industry segment, specifically targeting hotels rated three stars and below (The Iskandarian, 2020). This shift acknowledges the market reality where many 3-star hotels operate with a limited-service, high-affordability model, fundamentally aligning them with the budget segment's value proposition rather than the full-service segment. Consequently, this industry standard, which positions MyBHA as the umbrella body for all budget hotels that are 3-star and below (The Iskandarian, 2020), provides strong official justification for this study's inclusion of 3-star establishments that meet the core criteria of essential services and competitive pricing. The definition adopted for this study emphasizes hotels that maintain affordable pricing and offer limited, essential services, a criterion often met by 3-star establishments in the Malaysian context.

In the Malaysian context, a budget hotel is strategically positioned within the hospitality market as a limited-service or economy accommodation. These establishments are characterized by their primary focus on affordability and meeting essential guest needs, typically featuring fewer than 100 rooms and operating with a no-frills model that minimizes extensive amenities and luxury services (Shahidan et al., 2022). Budget hotels in Malaysia are characterized by their affordability, basic services, and convenient locations. Despite being two-star or less establishments, budget hotels play a pivotal role, with a focus on cost-effectiveness through streamlined services, standardized amenities, and modest accommodations. While the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC) traditionally classifies budget hotels as two-star and below, the industry's Malaysia Budget Hotel Association (MBHA) often defines this segment as three stars and below to reflect market realities.

The relationship between the intention to stay and the affordability of budget hotels underscores the significance of pricing in guest decisions (Purwanto et al., 2019; Ren et al., 2018). The operational traits of budget hotels, such as a robust branded identity, widespread geographic presence, and cost-effectiveness, contribute to their widespread appeal among budget-conscious travellers (Albattat et al., 2017).

Guest satisfaction in budget hotels is significantly influenced by factors like service quality, pricing, amenities, room design, and public areas (Nunkoo et al., 2020; Pitra et al., 2023). While price remains crucial for budget travellers, overall experience plays a vital role in satisfaction. Hotels must strike a balance between essential amenities, clean facilities, efficient service, and competitive pricing to foster both satisfaction and potential future stays. Noteworthy variations in information quality exist across different star-rated hotels, emphasizing the importance of higher-rated hotels providing more comprehensive details about their offerings (Cheng et al., 2023).

### 2.2 Muslim-friendly

Muslim-friendly tourism is a subtype of religious tourism that caters to the needs of Muslim travellers, providing facilities that comply with Islamic teachings and Sharia law (Bangsawan & Rahman, 2019). The burgeoning Muslim travel market has become a pivotal force in the global economy, with Muslims expending an estimated US$133 billion in 2022, marking a substantial increase from the previous year. Projections anticipate continued growth, reaching US$174 billion by 2027, underscoring the sector's robust trajectory (DinarStandard, 2023). Malaysia, maintaining its leading position for the tenth consecutive year, exemplifies the potential contributions of Muslim nations to the global Islamic economy, providing a blueprint for the successful integration of Islamic principles into diverse sectors (DinarStandard, 2023). Positioned at the forefront of the halal industry and Islamic finance, Malaysia serves as an exemplary model, poised for significant contributions and offering valuable insights for other Muslim nations navigating the intersection of Islamic principles and economic growth.

Muslim-friendly tourism and hospitality have emerged to address the specific needs of Muslim travellers, emphasizing cultural sensitivity and tailored experiences aligned with Islamic principles. This trend goes beyond serving halal food, encompassing the entire hotel operation, aligning with Shariah principles, and fostering a comprehensive travel experience (Adnan & Abdul Latif, 2018; Bastaman et al., 2022; Department of Standards Malaysia, 2015). This involves, among many others, separate prayer spaces, alcohol and pork-free environments, and gender-sensitive facilities. Prior research highlights key amenities such as Qur'ans, prayer mats, Qibla directions, and Halal-certified kitchens as foundational to Muslim-friendly hotel services, with cleanliness and staff performance being critical to guest satisfaction (Adnan & Abdul Latif, 2018). Formal halal certification for food and amenities further assures travellers of compliance with Islamic guidelines, fostering trust and promoting a comfortable and fulfilling travel experience.

The concept extends to halal tourism operators who adhere to formal halal criteria standards, obtain certification for halal food, provide prayer facilities, and implement transparent Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) to ensure compliance with Sharia principles (Junaidi, 2020). These criteria often include, but are not limited to, the absence of alcohol and pork products throughout the premises, the availability of gender-sensitive services, and the assurance of clean water sources (e.g., for ablution) and overall hygiene (Abdul Latif et al., 2024). The commitment to formal halal certification reassures travellers, promoting trust and contributing to a comfortable and faith-compatible travel experience.

In the realm of Muslim-friendly tourism, the influence of religious devotion on customer engagement and tourist satisfaction is highlighted (Abror et al., 2020). Muslim-friendly accommodation is distinguished by unique attributes, creating competitive advantages compared to conventional hospitality (Amer Nordin & Abd Rahman, 2018). The diverse needs of Muslim travellers, from seeking destinations with historical or religious significance to prioritizing prayer facilities and halal amenities, shape the landscape of Muslim-friendly tourism. Hotels that align with these expectations gain a competitive edge, attracting a growing segment of Muslim travellers seeking a comfortable and faith-compatible travel experience. This burgeoning market presents opportunities for the tourism industry to cultivate brand loyalty among Muslim travellers, emphasizing the importance of adherence to Shariah principles and transparent communication in fostering trust and ensuring a fulfilling travel experience.

### 2.3 Theoretical Foundation

The conceptual framework of this study is primarily anchored by two integrated theoretical lenses: Perceived Value Theory and the Islamic Consumption Theory. Perceived Value Theory is essential, as it posits that a consumer's choice is a function of the trade-off between the benefits received and the sacrifices made (Zeithaml, 1988). In the budget hotel context, this theory dictates that affordability (low price) is the primary sacrifice, while the core benefit is basic comfort and cleanliness (Yang et al., 2024). This study extends this model by integrating Islamic

Consumption Theory with the foundation developed by Monzer Kahf (Bella, 2024), which asserts that Muslim consumers evaluate products and services not only based on utility and price but also on Sharia compliance and Moral Conformity (Wilson, 2012; 2018). Islamic consumption, emphasizing rationality that incorporates both worldly and hereafter objectives (Bella, 2024). Therefore, the "benefit" component in the value equation for the Muslim budget traveller is multi-layered: it includes functional quality (cleanliness, room size) and faith-based quality (Qibla direction, water bidets, Halal transparency). By synthesizing these two theories, this research provides the necessary framework to analyse how budget hotels successfully minimize the sacrifice (price) while maximizing the multi-dimensional benefits (functional and faith-based) to achieve a superior "Muslim-Friendly Value for Money," thereby justifying the qualitative exploration of customer preferences and expectations.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Methods

The interview protocols utilized in this research were drawn from four separate studies (Muharam & Asutay, 2022; Razak et al., 2019; Suci et al., 2021). The researchers devised a protocol specifically for in-depth, semi-structured interviews with informants who possess firsthand experience as patrons of budget hotels. The data collection approach involved both guided and semi-structured interviews, giving the researchers the flexibility to pose follow-up questions and delve deeper into the discussion while still adhering to a predefined set of topics or questions. To ensure the robustness of the study methodology, an expert in the tourism industry reviewed the question protocols and validated the research approach.

### 3.2 Data Collection

The study employed a non-probability Convenience Sampling approach to recruit informants. The informants were Muslim guests of budget hotels with a classification of three stars and below. The informants were approached through group chats on Telegram, which consisted of university alumni from the tourism department. A brief message explaining the research purpose and requesting ten volunteers among the alumni was posted in the Telegram group. The researchers then communicated with the informants to schedule an online meeting for their respective interview sessions. Each interview session took between 30 and 45 minutes. Of the ten volunteers who responded, three decided to withdraw. The decision not to replace the three volunteers who withdrew was guided by the principle of thematic saturation. In qualitative analysis, the primary goal is to gather rich, in-depth data until the point where no new themes or conceptual categories emerge. The data collected from the final seven informants provided rich, consistent, and redundant accounts across the five main study themes (Awareness, Expectation, etc.). This achieved saturation, confirming that the sample was sufficient to address the research question, thereby prioritizing data depth and redundancy over mere numerical replacement (Guest et al., 2020; Hennink et al., 2017).

The informants consisted of four men and three women who had stayed in budget hotels across various locations in Malaysia. These areas included Alor Setar in Kedah, situated in the northern part of Peninsular Malaysia; Segamat in Johor, located in the southern region; and Kuantan in Pahang, found along the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia, among others. All informants were Malaysians and aged between 23 and 82 years old. Out of the seven informants, three declined to be recorded. During the online interview, a research assistant was present to assist with note-taking. The audio of the recorded sessions was then transcribed for analysis. During the interview, the questions were read to the informants in English. However, the responses from the interviewee and interactions were a mix of Malay and English. Each informant received a pseudonym used in data analysis to preserve anonymity, i.e., R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, and R7 (refer to Table 1).

### 3.3 Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis was conducted using Thematic Analysis following the systematic six-phase procedure established by Braun and Clarke (2006). Transcribed interviews were managed and organized using NVivo 12 software. The analysis began with the research team achieving deep data familiarization through multiple readings of the transcripts. Next, an inductive, semantic coding approach was applied by the primary researcher, generating short, descriptive labels for meaningful data segments. These initial codes were then clustered into potential thematic groups. To ensure trustworthiness and inter-coder reliability, the second researcher independently reviewed a 20% sample of the coded data, and discrepancies were resolved through consensus (Inter-coder check). This rigorous process led to the refinement of five major themes (Awareness, Expectation, Brand Loyalty, Communication, and Value for Money) that directly addressed the research questions. Refer to Table 1.

Table 1. Informants' descriptive statistics

| NO | Residence | Gender | Age | Status | Employment | Travelling period | Average Duration of Stay | Purpose of Stay | Last Location |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| R1 | Bandar Melaka | Female | 48 | Married | Govt Officer | mostly during school holidays | 1-3 days | Leisure | Tioman Island, Pahang |
| R2 | Dengkil, Selangor | Male | 31 | Married | Govt Officer | every week | 2-3 times a year | VFR | Kuantan, Pahang |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| R3 | Kajang, Selangor | Female | 23 | Single | Student | During university semester break, at least once a year | 6-7 days | Leisure | Arau, Perlis |
| R4 | Balakong Selangor | Male | 30 | Married | Self-employed | Long Holidays – Festive | 1-2 days | Leisure / VFR | Kulim, Kedah |
| R5 | Balakong Selangor | Female | 31 | Married | Self-employed | Long Holidays – Festive | 1-2 days | Leisure / VFR | Kulim, Kedah |
| R6 | Kajang, Selangor | Male | 28 | Single | Private Sector | Long Holidays – Festive | 1-2 days | Leisure | Segamat, Johor |
| R7 | Petaling Jaya, Selangor | Male | 82 | Married | Retired | No specific time | Two days | VFR / Others | Pulau Pinang |

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 4.1 Awareness and Decision-Making

The importance of awareness of Muslim-friendly facilities and services affecting hotel selection varies based on the findings. R2 and R7 prefer hotels to explicitly state their Muslim-friendly services, encompassing provisions such as prayer mats, Qibla direction, and toilet bidets.

*R2: "…hotels need to state the Muslim-friendly services [like] prayer mat, Qibla direction, and breakfast."*
*R7: "Yes, very aware. Will look for Muslim-friendly facilities."*

While some informants expected the provision to be available, stating, *"Malaysia as an Islamic country, this should not be a problem"* (R6), regardless of the ownership or operator of the hotels. R4 emphasized that *"necessities like a bidet are a must and expected".* It is also deemed desirable to state the availability of halal meals, if available. However, this would not be much of an issue since:

*R7: "..the hotels [are located] in a Muslim area. Easy to find [Halal] food. There was a non-Muslim hotel we went to, but it was next to a masjid. So, it is okay."*

This suggests that the location of the budget hotels is preferred to be within the vicinity of the Muslim community. The presence of non-Muslim places of worship ("tokong") within the hotel compound or setting can influence the decision-making process as informants seek to avoid potentially discomforting environments. In this context, any non-Muslim religious evidence, such as altars, signs, and symbols within the compound or setting, may act as a purchase deterrent.

*R4: "…if there is a tokong, it will affect the decision."*
*R7: "…. absolutely no tokong, or any other [non-Muslim religious] symbols. If there are, we will leave".*

Interestingly, the prioritization of Muslim-friendly services varies among informants. While some do not actively search for such features and prioritize factors like price and overall facilities, others consider the presence of Muslim staff at the front desk as an indicator of the hotel's Muslim-friendly approach and regard the provision of Qibla direction as a bonus rather than a necessity:

*R4: "Qibla direction is a bonus point. You use apps to get Qibla."*

It is noteworthy that the younger informants tend to rely on smartphone apps for Qibla direction, emphasizing the importance of integrating technology into the Muslim-friendly services offered by hotels (Adnan & Abdul Latif, 2018). Despite the diversity in preferences, there is a common expectation among informants for hotels to meet necessities, such as bidet availability. At the same time, features like a Qibla direction are viewed as advantageous. Interestingly, informants differ in their awareness and importance of Muslim-friendly services, with some needing to seek or be aware of such indicators actively.

*R3: "…don't expect anything more, only a place to sleep. [It is] a bonus point if [there are] Muslim-friendly services."*

Conversely, some individuals are highly aware and actively seek Muslim-friendly facilities when making reservations, often using online platforms for bookings, either independently or through family members.

*R7: "..booking [of hotel room is] done online by [my] son or myself.*

The influence of the spouse in the decision-making process, particularly regarding hotel location and safety considerations, is evident, highlighting the collaborative nature of hotel selection within couples.

### 4.2 Expectations and Experiences

In the evaluation of budget hotel preferences, cleanliness emerges as a paramount factor, with informants expressing dissatisfaction when encountering issues such as inadequate cleanliness and pest infestations, for example, cockroach infestations. These concerns highlight the crucial role cleanliness plays in shaping the overall guest experience. While cleanliness is anticipated, variations in standards exist, impacting the overall evaluation of a hotel.

*R1: "The cleanliness was not good. There were cockroaches."*
*R7: "…must have clean floors, or carpet. Sometimes my wife would [perform her] Solah on the bed because the floor isn't clean enough."*

Expectations regarding Muslim-friendly amenities encompass fundamental necessities such as water bidets, Qibla direction, prayer mats, and Qurans, seen as advantageous extras that contribute to a positive guest experience. Informants emphasize the importance of a suitable space for performing prayers, requiring cleanliness and accommodating at least two individuals simultaneously. Budget hotels with smaller room areas are suggested to have a Musolla as a communal facility, as suggested by R5, to ensure room comfort.

Ensuring the availability of clean, drinkable water is another notable expectation, whether provided at the hotel counter or within guest rooms. However, the acknowledgement that these offerings come at a cost to hotels underscores the significance placed on such provisions by guests.

*R4: "...water bidet is a must. Qibla direction, [prayer] mat, and Quran are bonuses, as it is a cost to hotels.*

### 4.3 Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty within the context of hotel selection is intricately tied to various considerations, with affordability being a significant factor in influencing decisions. Informants express a willingness to choose branded budget accommodation, provided the price is right. One informant suggested that the price should be at RM 100 or less, emphasizing the importance of deriving value for money. This underscores the pivotal role that pricing plays in the establishment of brand loyalty, as travellers seek a harmonious balance between cost-effectiveness and quality.

*R1: "Yes, why not? But it has to be worth it. RM 100 or less."*
*R7: "Yes. It is preferred, but sometimes [there are] no choices, so take it as it is."*

While active marketing is not necessarily a prerequisite for brand loyalty, informants express an openness to trying hotels that actively promote themselves. The potential impact of effective marketing strategies on brand loyalty is evident, highlighting the importance of establishments effectively communicating their offerings and values to potential guests. Preferences lean towards Muslim-friendly (MF) hotels, particularly if they align with Islamic principles and offer services that exceed expectations. This indicates the importance of aligning with cultural and religious values as a means to foster brand loyalty among guests.

*R4: "Yes, [my] preference [I] would choose a branded MF hotel if available, [but] if they follow Islamic principles and exceed expectations."*

However, some informants pragmatically prioritize factors such as price and the fundamental need for a good night's sleep over other considerations. Price sensitivity is apparent, as informants may consider budget-friendly options that meet their basic requirements, indicating that brand loyalty is not solely reliant on luxurious amenities or specific services.

*R5: "… not really, since the priority is to sleep. Price plays an important role. If branded muslim-friendly [budget hotels] offer cheap prices, then I will consider my decision."*

Hotel ratings hold varying degrees of importance, with some informants prioritizing them over other factors like price in their decision-making process. The preference for hotels with positive ratings suggests that a positive reputation and positive public perception contribute to the establishment of brand loyalty.

*R6: "Not really, as the hotel rating is much more of a priority."*

The significance of an Islamic image, including visual elements such as frames depicting Allah and Muhammad, underscores the importance of cultural and religious alignment in shaping brand loyalty. Informants emphasize the impact of cleanliness on the Muslim image, highlighting the interconnectedness of cleanliness, Islamic imagery, and the overall perception of a hotel within the framework of brand loyalty.

*R7: "Muslim image is important, like having Allah and Muhammad [decorative] frames in [the] lobby or front desk. So, the Islamic image is important. Halal is important."*

### 4.4 Communication and Transparency

The informants emphasize that in Malaysia, the acceptance of budget hotels, even those owned by non-Muslim individuals, is contingent upon their commitment to being Muslim-friendly. While the acceptance of such establishments is notable, the key criterion remains their adherence to Muslim-friendly principles.

R1: *“It is not a problem in Malaysia. Even if it is owned by a non-Muslim, it is okay, but must be Muslim friendly.”*

In the era of online bookings, visuals carry significant weight, yet informants emphasize that reviews from customers are paramount, illustrating the importance of peer feedback in shaping perceptions. This underscores the need for transparent communication about the hotel's offerings, ensuring that the information aligns with guests' expectations and avoids potential discrepancies that may arise from misleading visuals.

*R1: "… look at pictures in Booking.com. The most important part is the guest review. Because pictures can be misleading."*

The importance of communication extends beyond Muslim guests, as it is seen as a means to indicate to non-Muslims which products or services are not permitted. This demonstrates the multifaceted nature of communication, serving not only to inform but also to set clear boundaries and expectations, perhaps relating to vices.

*R3: "Yes, it is important, but also to indicate to non-Muslims that certain products or services are not permitted."*

In the marketing realm, adherence to the Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) guidelines is deemed mandatory when promoting Muslim-friendly services. These guidelines, which cover areas such as the provision of Halal food, prayer facilities (e.g., Musolla, Qibla direction in rooms), and Sharia-compliant operational procedures (e.g., no alcohol served), are essential for fostering consumer trust. Transparency in incorporating these guidelines, particularly on the hotel's website, is seen as a crucial aspect of effective communication, fostering trust, and ensuring guests are well-informed.

*R4: "Yes, it is a must in all platforms if you are marketing as MF. The ITC guideline should be attached to their personal website."*

### 4.5 Value for Money

The inclusion of amenities related to Muslim-friendly services, such as places for ablution, Qurans, and Qibla directions, is deemed valuable by informants. However, the reliance on smartphones for certain services indicates a pragmatic approach, suggesting that hotels can enhance value without incurring substantial costs. The notion that these amenities are typically included in the overall costs of a stay reinforces the expectation among informants that such offerings should not significantly impact pricing.

*R3: "Yes, it is, places for ablution, have Quran and Qibla direction. But we have our smartphones. It is not a burden for hotels to add."*

Informants agree on the importance of incorporating Muslim-friendly amenities without substantially affecting costs. Praying mats and Qibla direction, seen as essential for Muslim guests, are perceived as valuable additions that contribute positively to the overall guest experience. This aligns with the idea that value for money is not solely determined by cost but also by the inclusion of culturally sensitive and relevant services.

*R5: "Yes, it should be, since the amenities or services related to Muslim-friendly, like a prayer mat and Qibla direction, are not costly."*
*R7: "If there is a Quran or Yasin in the room, that will be good too. These items are not expensive. It is affordable to purchase. It is difficult to use [Quran] apps."*

Despite the acknowledgement of the value of Muslim-friendly amenities, informants note that the presentation of budget hotels can vary. Some establishments may need to improve their appearance, both externally and internally. This highlights the potential disparity between outward appearances and the actual quality of accommodation, emphasizing the need for a holistic assessment of value.

*R7: "… but sometimes, budget hotels are not presentable. For example, the entrance of this particular budget hotel had creepers and was a bit untidy and unkept. No lights outside too. But as we entered the hotel, it was okay."*

The older generation emphasizes the importance of having a physical Quran in hotel rooms, in contrast to the youth, who predominantly rely on digital means. Expectations for Muslim-friendly standards, such as Qibla direction and praying mats, exist, especially among the older demographic, while the younger generation tends to utilize smartphone applications for this purpose.

Loyalty to specific budget hotel brands, such as Seri Malaysia, is observed among the older generation. However, they may consider other brands or non-branded establishments when limited options are available. These nuanced preferences highlight the dynamic interplay of cultural, generational, and religious factors in shaping the choices of Malaysian Muslims in the budget hotel sector.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND MARKETING IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study offer a crucial lens into the motivations and expectations of Malaysian Muslim travellers, providing a direct roadmap for budget hotels to strategically align their service delivery and marketing efforts. The demand for basic Muslim-friendly services such as prayer mats, Qibla direction, and water bidets aligns with the broader, non-negotiable trend of Muslim-friendly tourism that emphasizes Sharia compliance (Harun et al., 2024).

From a strategic marketing viewpoint, the inclusion of these fundamental amenities must be positioned as a core value proposition, not a mere add-on. Halal-friendly facilities and services have been shown to positively influence the visit intentions of Muslim tourists (Bilgihan & Ricci, 2023), confirming that these features are essential in shaping their travel decisions and should be heavily featured in all promotional materials. The reliance on digital technology, particularly among younger travellers for services like Qibla direction, suggests that budget hotels should integrate modern, low-cost technologies to enhance guest satisfaction and meet contemporary customer expectations (Bilgihan & Ricci, 2023). This presents a strategic opportunity to streamline operations through self-check-in systems or to enhance service delivery via user-friendly mobile apps or optimized websites that offer essential religious information and logistical services, ultimately enhancing the guest experience.

### 5.1 The Marketing Mandate for Cleanliness and Value

The finding that cleanliness is a major factor in hotel stays, with informants expressing significant dissatisfaction when hygiene standards were compromised (Yang et al., 2024), establishes cleanliness as a non-negotiable marketing priority, a baseline expectation that must be met before faith-based amenities become relevant. Cleanliness and essential Muslim-friendly amenities are co-dependent; basic service quality remains vital for budget hotels despite the additional demand for religiously aligned services (Arasli et al., 2023). This means budget hotels must ensure rigorous, transparent cleanliness protocols while also strategically investing in essential Muslim-friendly amenities to strengthen their value proposition. The marketing message should communicate not only competitive pricing but also the certainty of a clean, compliant environment.

Furthermore, affordability remains a decisive factor, affecting Muslim travellers' preference for budget hotels priced at MYR 100 or less [1]. This preference aligns with Perceived Value Theory (Papastathopoulos et al., 2021), which underscores that the acceptable price ceiling is intricately tied to the perceived benefits. Budget hotels must strategically communicate that the incorporation of faith-based attributes (halal) is included within that highly competitive price point, effectively translating 'Muslim-friendly' into 'superior value for money.'

**5.2 Cultivating Authentic Brand Loyalty**

The role of brand loyalty in hotel selection is strongly emphasized, with cultural and religious orientation being a key factor in nurturing trust and repeat patronage (Maghembe & Magasi, 2024). Building loyalty among Muslim travellers requires more than mere affordability; it demands an authentic alignment with Islamic principles and values. Hotels should cultivate a genuine Islamic identity through visible elements, such as displaying religious symbols like calligraphic frames (as noted by informants), highlighting the significance of aligning hotel marketing and branding with these cultural and religious values.

This calls for transparent and honest marketing across all touchpoints. Transparent communication is equally critical; visually appealing promotional materials and customer reviews that specifically highlight Muslim-friendly services can effectively influence booking decisions by fostering immediate trust.

Finally, the differing expectations between older and younger generations, such as the preference for physical Qurans among older travellers versus digital alternatives for younger ones (Chen et al., 2023), underscore the need for highly adaptive service delivery. These insights suggest that hotels need to adopt a holistic approach to service and marketing, balancing the traditional, explicit requirements of some customers with cost-effective, digital-first solutions for others. By integrating digital tools, prioritizing cleanliness, reinforcing an authentic Islamic brand image, and ensuring clear communication, budget hotels can better meet the diverse needs of Malaysian Muslim travellers and successfully position themselves competitively in this critical market segment.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The study provides comprehensive insights into Malaysian Muslim travellers' preferences and expectations when selecting budget hotels. Across various dimensions, namely Awareness and Decision-Making, Expectation and Experiences, Brand Loyalty, Communication and Transparency, and Value for Money, a deeper understanding emerges. Informants showcase diverse expectations, with some emphasizing explicit communication about Muslim-friendly

[1] The exchange rate of USD 1 is approximately MYR 4.48 as of 8 April 2025

services and others adopting a more pragmatic approach, relying on technology for certain services.

Consistent with the expectations listed in previous studies (Salleh et al., 2019), cleanliness is paramount for a positive guest experience, and the study acknowledges the cost implications of offering Muslim-friendly amenities, emphasizing their perceived value. Brand loyalty is shaped by a delicate balance between affordability and quality, with an Islamic image playing a crucial role. Effective communication and transparency are deemed essential, with a reliance on visuals and customer reviews. The perceived value for money is intricately linked to the inclusion of Muslim-friendly amenities, acknowledging the pragmatic use of smartphones for certain services. Overall, the findings guide the hospitality industry in tailoring services to meet the diverse preferences of Malaysian Muslim travellers, enhancing their overall satisfaction.

## 7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Despite providing rich, context-specific insights into the Muslim traveller segment, this study is subject to several methodological and contextual limitations that offer clear directions for future scholarly inquiry. Methodologically, the research relies on an inherently small sample size derived via a convenience and snowball sampling technique. While this was sufficient for achieving thematic saturation and uncovering deep conceptual nuances, it could restrict the generalizability of the findings to the broader Malaysian Muslim traveller population. Furthermore, two specific constraints impacted data collection: three of the final seven informants declined to be audio-recorded, meaning their data relied exclusively on researcher note-taking, which introduces a potential variation in data quality. Additionally, the interviews involved a mix of Malay and English languages, and while the researchers are proficient, the subtle nuances lost or gained during the in-session language switching or post-hoc translation for analysis may introduce a potential source of translation bias.

These limitations serve as a foundation for possible future research areas. First, there is a need to quantitatively test the generalizability of the five identified themes—particularly the balance between faith-based expectations and affordability—across a larger, more demographically representative sample of Muslim travellers. Second, this study focused exclusively on the demand side (travellers); therefore, future research must adopt a holistic approach by integrating the perspectives of budget hotel managers and owners. This supplier-side research is critical for understanding the operational challenges, cost implications, and marketing efficacy of implementing and communicating Muslim-friendly services. Finally, the observed pragmatic reliance on smartphones among travellers suggests a readiness for advanced technological adoption. Future work should specifically investigate the feasibility and traveller acceptance of incorporating innovative technological solutions into the budget hotel offering, such as piloting the acceptance of cryptocurrency as a payment option, developing co-created innovative services through proprietary apps (Sarmah et al., 2017), or offering carbon offset features as part of a sustainable hospitality package (Adnan & Abdul Latif, 2018). Such research will provide actionable data for the industry on leveraging technology to meet the diverse and evolving needs of the modern Muslim traveller.

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ARTICLE

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# Persepsi Pelancong Terhadap Kesalahan Papan Tanda di Muar, Johor

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## ABSTRAK

Muar, Johor dikenali sebagai Bandar Maharani dan merupakan salah satu destinasi pelancongan warisan yang unik di Malaysia. Bandar ini bukan sahaja menonjolkan deretan bangunan kolonial yang bersejarah malah terkenal dengan makanan tradisi dan warisan budaya yang unik. Suasana bandar yang bercirikan unsur moden dan klasik ini menjadikan Muar sebagai destinasi pilihan pelancong domestik dan antarabangsa. Namun, penggunaan papan tanda yang baik sering diabaikan. Walaupun perkara ini nampak kecil namun kalau tidak diberikan keutamaan, boleh menjadi salah satu sebab daya tarikan pelancong menjadi kurang. Oleh itu, kajian ini berfokus kepada dua objektif iaitu mengenal pasti kesalahan papan tanda di bandar Muar dari aspek linguistik dan juga menjalankan tinjauan terhadap persepsi pelancong luar Muar berhubung kesalahan papan tanda yang terdapat di Bandar Muar. Kajian ini merupakan kajian kualitatif yang melibatkan lima orang pelancong untuk ditemu bual manakala pengumpulan data seperti kesalahan bahasa pada papan tanda perniagaan dan iklan juga dilakukan. Hasil kajian ini mendapati terdapat empat jenis kesalahan dari aspek linguistik iaitu kesalahan ejaan, kesalahan penggunaan istilah, kesalahan morfologi dan frasa serta percampuran kod. Pelancong turut menyatakan bahawa kesalahan ini memberi kesan negatif terhadap kefahaman dan imej bandar.

Kata kunci: Kesalahan Papan Tanda; Muar; Pelancong; Persepsi

## 1. PENGENALAN

Muar, Johor merupakan sebuah bandar bersejarah yang terkenal dengan warisan budaya, seni bina kolonial, dan keunikan gastronomi yang menjadi daya tarikan utama pelancong domestik serta antarabangsa. Dalam konteks pembangunan pelancongan, papan tanda berfungsi sebagai salah satu elemen komunikasi visual yang kritikal bagi menyampaikan maklumat arah, lokasi, peringatan keselamatan, serta penerangan mengenai tapak atau produk pelancongan. Lebih daripada sekadar medium pandu arah, papan tanda juga menjadi simbol identiti bahasa dan budaya setempat. Namun begitu, kewujudan kesalahan bahasa pada papan tanda, seperti ejaan yang tidak tepat, penggunaan istilah yang tidak selaras, terjemahan literal yang mengelirukan, dan percampuran kod bahasa, berpotensi menjejaskan imej profesional sesebuah destinasi. Isu ini bukan sahaja mengganggu kefahaman pelancong, malah boleh mempengaruhi persepsi mereka terhadap kualiti pengurusan pelancongan di kawasan tersebut.

Dalam era globalisasi dan keterhubungan maklumat yang pantas, papan tanda menjadi sumber rujukan segera bagi pelancong yang ingin mendapatkan maklumat di lapangan. Oleh itu, ketepatan linguistik, kejelasan mesej, dan keutuhan visual merupakan faktor utama yang menyumbang kepada pengalaman pelancong yang positif Sebaliknya, kesalahan pada papan tanda boleh mengundang kekeliruan makna, salah tafsir maklumat, atau mewujudkan elemen humor yang tidak disengajakan, yang akhirnya boleh merendahkan reputasi destinasi tersebut. Bagi pelancong antarabangsa, terjemahan bahasa Inggeris yang tidak tepat boleh menjejaskan keberkesanan komunikasi pelancongan, sekaligus menurunkan tahap kepercayaan terhadap kualiti maklumat yang disampaikan. Isu ini juga mempunyai implikasi yang lebih luas terhadap pemeliharaan identiti bahasa dan citra budaya, kerana bahasa yang digunakan pada papan tanda mencerminkan nilai, sejarah, dan profesionalisme sesebuah komuniti.

Kajian ini dilaksanakan untuk meneliti persepsi pelancong terhadap kesalahan papan tanda di Muar, Johor, dengan fokus kepada sejauh mana aspek linguistik memberi kesan kepada pandangan, keselesaan, dan kepuasan mereka ketika berkunjung. Analisis persepsi pelancong membolehkan penyelidik menilai impak kesalahan bahasa terhadap pengalaman pelancongan secara holistik, serta mengenal pasti tahap sensitiviti pelancong terhadap aspek bahasa dalam komunikasi visual. Dapatan kajian ini diharapkan dapat memberikan panduan kepada pihak berkuasa tempatan, pengusaha pelancongan, dan pereka bentuk papan tanda dalam memperbaiki ketepatan bahasa serta meningkatkan keberkesanan penyampaian maklumat. Di samping itu, kajian ini turut menyumbang kepada perbincangan akademik mengenai hubungan antara bahasa, imej destinasi, dan persepsi pelancong, di mana kesalahan linguistik yang kelihatan remeh berpotensi memberikan kesan yang signifikan terhadap reputasi dan daya tarikan sesebuah destinasi pelancongan.

## 2. KAJIAN LEPAS

Terdapat beberapa kajian lepas yang telah dilakukan bagi melihat komunikasi pelancongan yang terdapat dalam negara kita. Kajian yang dilakukan oleh (Nordin et al., 2014), telah menjalankan kajian yang meneliti analisis kesalahan penggunaan bahasa papan tanda perniagaan di Pekan, Jitra, Kedah. Kajian ini dijalankan secara tinjauan iaitu dengan mendapatkan maklumat-maklumat dan data mengenai kesalahan bahasa. Hasil kajian menunjukkan terdapat kesalahan dari segi ejaan, kesalahan frasa dan kesalahan morfologi. Kesalahan bahasa pada papan tanda perniagaan di Pekan Jitra masih lagi berada pada tahap yang tinggi. Hasil kajian juga menunjukkan bahawa kesalahan-kesalahan bahasa yang dilakukan berpunca daripada beberapa faktor antaranya ialah kelemahan dalam penguasaan bahasa Melayu, faktor sambil lewa dan tidak meletakkan kepentingan untuk memartabatkan bahasa Melayu. Kajian ini secara keseluruhannya telah memaparkan analisis kesalahan yang baik, namun kajian ini tidak mengupas atau meneliti persepsi pelancong mengenai kesalahan papan tanda perniagaan di Jitra, Kedah. Hal ini menunjukkan wujudnya perbezaan yang ketara antara kajian ini dengan kajian yang dilakukan.

Penggunaan Bahasa Melayu di papan tanda Lebuh Raya Selatan yang dilakukan oleh (Haida et al., 2016) bertujuan untuk memantau dan menilai tahap penggunaan Bahasa Melayu yang betul di papan tanda sepanjang Lebuh Raya Selatan. Terdapat tiga tujuan utama kajian ini. Pertama, memantau penggunaan Bahasa Melayu yang tepat dari aspek leksikal, ejaan, frasa, ayat, dan istilah pada papan tanda. Kedua, mengenal pasti kewujudan penggunaan bahasa selain Bahasa Melayu (bahasa asing) di papan tanda, termasuk Bahasa Inggeris, Mandarin, Tamil, dan bahasa lain, serta menilai bentuk tulisan yang digunakan. Ketiga, meneliti penggunaan logo atau simbol pada papan tanda arah dari sudut keselamatan, kesesuaian budaya, serta keberadaan unsur agama dan sensitiviti kaum. Di samping itu, kajian turut menilai kedudukan papan tanda sama ada dalam kawasan pagar lebuh raya (sah) atau di luar pagar (tidak sah). Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah pemerhatian lapangan secara menyeluruh di sepanjang laluan Lebuh Raya Selatan (Zon Selatan: Seremban – Johor Bahru – Seremban). Pemantauan dijalankan terhadap 501 papan tanda dan iklan. Data dianalisis mengikut lima aspek linguistik utama: (1) leksikal (pemilihan kosa kata), (2) ejaan, (3) frasa (hukum Diterangkan-Menerangkan), (4) struktur ayat (subjek dan predikat), dan (5) istilah atau makna (kata pinjaman). Selain itu, bahasa yang digunakan pada papan tanda dikategorikan mengikut jenis bahasa, manakala penggunaan logo/simbol dianalisis dari aspek saiz, bentuk, keselamatan, nilai budaya, dan elemen agama. Kajian juga membezakan papan tanda yang diletakkan di dalam pagar lebuh raya (sah) dengan yang berada di luar pagar (tidak sah).

Bagi aspek penggunaan Bahasa Melayu yang betul, dapatan menunjukkan tahap pematuhan yang tinggi: 90.6% papan tanda menggunakan leksikal yang sesuai, 97.2%

mempunyai ejaan yang betul, 97% mematuhi hukum D-M, 95.6% menggunakan struktur ayat yang tepat, dan 95.6% menggunakan istilah/makna yang sesuai. Walaupun demikian, wujud peratus kecil papan tanda dengan kesalahan seperti ejaan yang salah, frasa yang tidak mematuhi hukum D-M, serta penggunaan kosa kata atau istilah yang kurang tepat. Dari segi penggunaan bahasa asing, bahasa Melayu merupakan bahasa yang paling banyak digunakan (47.9%), diikuti rapat oleh bahasa Inggeris (43.7%), manakala bahasa Mandarin (5.2%), Tamil (0.6%), dan bahasa lain (2.6%) digunakan pada kadar yang lebih rendah. Dapatan ini menunjukkan papan tanda di lebuh raya masih mengutamakan bahasa kebangsaan, namun penggunaan bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua amat dominan, selari dengan keperluan komunikasi kepada pengguna pelbagai latar bahasa. Bagi penggunaan logo/simbol, hampir semua papan tanda (99.8%) mempunyai saiz dan bentuk yang selamat, tiada unsur rasis (100%), tiada elemen agama yang terpesong (100%), dan majoriti mematuhi nilai budaya (98.2%). Namun, terdapat 1.8% papan tanda yang dikategorikan tidak sesuai dari segi budaya. Semua papan tanda arah yang menggunakan bahasa Inggeris (100%) dinilai sesuai. Seterusnya, dalam aspek kedudukan papan tanda, 64.7% terletak dalam kawasan pagar lebuh raya (sah), manakala 35.3% berada di luar pagar (tidak sah). Walaupun majoriti papan tanda mematuhi kedudukan yang dibenarkan, peratusan papan tanda di luar pagar menunjukkan perlunya penguatkuasaan yang lebih ketat terhadap penempatan papan tanda tidak sah. Kajian ini membuktikan bahawa tahap penggunaan Bahasa Melayu di papan tanda Lebuh Raya Selatan adalah baik dan mematuhi kaedah linguistik yang betul, meskipun masih terdapat ruang untuk penambahbaikan dalam pemilihan kosa kata, ketepatan ejaan, dan penggunaan istilah. Penggunaan bahasa asing, terutamanya bahasa Inggeris, mencerminkan keperluan komunikasi yang inklusif kepada pengguna lebuh raya pelbagai bangsa dan warganegara. Selain itu, penempatan papan tanda perlu dipantau agar mematuhi garis panduan keselamatan dan undang-undang. Hasil kajian ini penting untuk dijadikan rujukan kepada pihak berkuasa tempatan, pengendali lebuh raya, dan pengiklan bagi memastikan papan tanda bukan sahaja memenuhi tujuan komunikasi, tetapi juga memartabatkan Bahasa Melayu sebagai bahasa kebangsaan.

Kajian yang dilakukan oleh (Muhammadin et al., 2018) yang turut melihat penggunaan bahasa Melayu pada papan nama premis perniagaan. Kajian ini telah dilakukan di sekitar Bandaraya Kuala Terengganu. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti bentuk kesalahan dan faktor-faktor kesalahan penggunaan ejaan, dan menganalisis aspek kesalahan penggunaan ejaan pada papan tanda atau iklan dari aspek struktur kata. Kajian ini telah menggunakan kaedah dan tatacara yang merangkumi pemilihan kawasan, pengutipan data di lapangan, penyaringan dan pengekodan data kajian serta penganalisisan dan pentafsiran data. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan tahap penggunaan bahasa Melayu pada papan tanda premis perniagaan berada pada paras yang kurang memuaskan. Sebanyak 50% premis tidak mengutamakan bahasa Melayu, 20% kurang mengutamakan, manakala hanya 30% yang mengutamakan bahasa kebangsaan. Tahap pematuhan tatabahasa juga rendah, dengan majoriti papan tanda dikesan tidak mematuhi kaedah tatabahasa standard. Enam jenis kesalahan utama dikenal pasti iaitu Penggunaan loghat setempat (dialek Terengganu) – Contohnya "Restoran Makang Sekak-sekak Nok" dan "Mee Goreng RM1.90 Mok Kite Marah Jual Mahal" yang menggunakan penambahan fonem /g/ dan unsur penegasan tipikal dialek tempatan. Faktor utama ialah kebiasaan peniaga menggunakan bahasa harian dan keinginan menonjolkan identiti daerah. Kedua, iaitu Penggunaan bahasa Inggeris sepenuhnya – Misalnya "Best Trade", mencerminkan persepsi bahawa bahasa Inggeris lebih eksklusif atau berprestij berbanding bahasa Melayu. Ketiga, Kesalahan ejaan – Contoh "Perabut Huat Sin" dan "Perabut Jati" yang sepatutnya dieja "Perabot". Kesalahan ini berpunca daripada kegagalan mengemas kini papan tanda kepada ejaan standard. Kesalahan morfologi – Termasuk penggunaan imbuhan yang tidak tepat seperti "Kedai Jahitan Aziz" (sepatutnya "Kedai Jahit Aziz"), dan kegagalan menggunakan kata nama khas lengkap seperti "Dobi Din" (sepatutnya "Kedai Dobi Din"). Kesalahan frasa (Hukum Diterangkan-Menerangkan) – Contohnya "Isma Nasi Ayam" yang menggunakan susunan M-D dipengaruhi oleh struktur bahasa Inggeris/Cina, sedangkan dalam bahasa Melayu bentuk betul ialah "Kedai Nasi Ayam Isma". Penggunaan bahasa bercampur (bahasa rojak) – Misalnya "D'warung Udang Galah Power", menggabungkan unsur bahasa Melayu dan Inggeris demi tujuan komersial tetapi menjejaskan standard bahasa. Hasil kajian mendapati faktor utama kesalahan bahasa termasuk sikap pemilik premis yang memandang ringan aspek bahasa, pengaruh bahasa asing dan dialek, serta ketiadaan penguatkuasaan tegas oleh pihak berkuasa tempatan. Di samping itu, wujud kecenderungan menggunakan bahasa yang dianggap "menarik" atau "unik" bagi tujuan pemasaran tanpa mempedulikan kesahihan linguistik. Secara keseluruhan, kajian menegaskan keperluan memperketat peraturan penggunaan bahasa Melayu di papan tanda, termasuk peranan Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP) serta Pihak Berkuasa Tempatan (PBT) dalam proses kelulusan papan tanda. Langkah seperti mewajibkan kelulusan bahasa sebelum pemasangan papan tanda, melantik pegawai bahasa di PBT, dan mengadakan kempen kesedaran disarankan bagi meningkatkan kualiti bahasa di ruang awam. Kajian ini turut menggariskan bahawa pematuhan kepada bahasa standard bukan sahaja mencerminkan identiti nasional, tetapi juga berperanan sebagai medium komunikasi yang efektif kepada masyarakat tempatan dan pelancong.

Kajian mengenai papan iklan luar dan pemilihan sosial yang dilakukan oleh (Othman et al., 2020) mempunyai sedikit perbezaan dengan kajian-kajian sebelum ini. Kajian ini dijalankan bagi meneliti penggunaan bahasa Melayu pada papan tanda dan iklan di sekitar daerah Kajang, Selangor, khususnya dari segi tahap pematuhan kepada tatabahasa standard dan peraturan bahasa kebangsaan. Isu utama yang diketengahkan ialah kewujudan pelbagai bentuk kesalahan bahasa dalam papan tanda perniagaan, yang secara tidak langsung menjejaskan imej bahasa Melayu sebagai bahasa rasmi negara. Penyelidik memberi tumpuan kepada kesalahan ejaan, struktur frasa dan ayat, penggunaan istilah, serta percampuran bahasa (bahasa rojak) yang sering berlaku dalam konteks perniagaan dan promosi di kawasan bandar. Kajian mendapati tahap penggunaan bahasa Melayu yang betul dalam papan tanda masih belum memuaskan. Terdapat peratusan signifikan papan tanda yang tidak mematuhi tatabahasa baku, termasuk kesalahan ejaan seperti penggunaan huruf besar secara tidak konsisten, pengguguran atau penambahan huruf, serta ejaan kata pinjaman yang tidak mengikut pedoman Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP). Selain itu, kesalahan frasa yang melanggar hukum Diterangkan-Menerangkan (D-M) turut dikenal pasti, khususnya apabila susunan ayat dipengaruhi oleh struktur bahasa Inggeris. Fenomena ini memperlihatkan pengaruh kuat bahasa asing dalam penjenamaan dan promosi perniagaan, walaupun peraturan mewajibkan penggunaan bahasa Melayu yang tepat.

Penggunaan bahasa rojak juga dilihat berleluasa, di mana pemilik premis mencampurkan bahasa Melayu dengan bahasa Inggeris atau bahasa lain bagi memberi kesan “moden” atau “antarabangsa” pada papan tanda mereka. Walaupun strategi ini mungkin dilihat sebagai daya tarikan komersial, ia menimbulkan kebimbangan dari segi pemeliharaan identiti bahasa kebangsaan. Selain itu, kajian mendapati sebahagian papan tanda menggunakan istilah yang tidak tepat atau tidak sesuai konteks, seperti menterjemah secara literal tanpa mengambil kira makna sebenar dalam bahasa sasaran. Faktor yang menyumbang kepada kesalahan ini termasuklah sikap sambil lewa pemilik premis terhadap peraturan bahasa, kurangnya kesedaran tentang kepentingan pematuhan kepada tatabahasa baku, dan kelemahan penguatkuasaan oleh pihak berkuasa tempatan. Dalam banyak kes, pemilik premis lebih menitikberatkan aspek reka bentuk dan elemen visual papan tanda berbanding ketepatan bahasa. Tambahan pula, pengaruh globalisasi dan keinginan menyesuaikan diri dengan trend pemasaran antarabangsa turut mendorong penggunaan bahasa asing secara berlebihan.

Walaupun begitu, kajian turut menunjukkan terdapat papan tanda yang mematuhi sepenuhnya peraturan bahasa, menggunakan bahasa Melayu dengan tepat, jelas, dan mesra pembaca. Papan tanda sebegini bukan sahaja memudahkan komunikasi dengan pelanggan, malah memperkukuh kedudukan bahasa Melayu sebagai bahasa rasmi dan bahasa perdagangan. Hal ini membuktikan bahawa pematuhan terhadap tatabahasa baku tidak menghalang kreativiti atau daya tarikan visual, malah boleh meningkatkan imej perniagaan. Berdasarkan dapatan, penyelidik mencadangkan beberapa langkah penambahbaikan. Pertama, pihak berkuasa tempatan perlu mengetatkan syarat kelulusan papan tanda dengan mewajibkan semakan bahasa oleh pihak berautoriti seperti DBP sebelum pemasangan. Kedua, kempen kesedaran awam mengenai kepentingan penggunaan bahasa Melayu yang betul harus diperluas, termasuk latihan dan bengkel kepada pemilik premis. Ketiga, hukuman atau denda yang lebih tegas boleh dikenakan terhadap premis yang ingkar, bagi memastikan kepatuhan berterusan. Secara rumusannya, kajian ini menegaskan bahawa papan tanda bukan sahaja medium komunikasi komersial, tetapi juga wahana penting dalam pemeliharaan dan pemartabatan bahasa Melayu. Kesalahan bahasa yang dibiarkan tanpa pembetulan bukan sahaja menjejaskan fungsi komunikasi, malah mencerminkan kelemahan dalam pengurusan identiti bahasa di ruang awam. Oleh itu, semua pihak—termasuk pemilik premis, pereka grafik, pihak berkuasa tempatan, dan DBP—perlu memainkan peranan aktif untuk memastikan setiap papan tanda yang dipasang selaras dengan peraturan bahasa kebangsaan. Langkah ini bukan sahaja memelihara keindahan bahasa Melayu, tetapi juga mengangkat martabatnya sebagai simbol identiti nasional di tengah-tengah arus globalisasi dan persaingan komersial yang semakin sengit.

Di samping itu, kajian lepas yang pernah mengupas mengenai komunikasi pelancongan adalah seperti kajian yang dilakukan oleh (Ab Razak & Ahmad, 2021). Kajian yang bertajuk "Penggunaan User-Generated Content Dalam Promosi Pelancongan Putrajaya" telah mengupas mengenai penggunaan *User-generated Content* dalam promosi Pelancongan di Putrajaya. *User-Generated Content* (UGC) merupakan kandungan yang dijana pengguna seperti pandangan para pelancong tentang pengalaman mereka sepanjang melawati sesebuah produk pelancongan tersebut. Di dalam kajian ini, adalah bertujuan menganalisis cadangan penawaran produk konvensional yang dijalankan oleh Perbadanan Putrajaya, cadangan penawaran promosi 8P UGC melalui laman web TripAdvisor dan bagaimana UGC memenuhi konsep 8P terhadap pemasaran di Putrajaya. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif analisis kandungan iaitu pengumpulan data melalui kandungan yang dijana pengguna di laman web TripAdvisor dengan jumlah kutipan sebanyak 500 kandungan yang dijana pengguna. Kutipan data adalah berdasarkan tarikan utama lokasi-lokasi seperti Masjid Putra, IOI City Mall, Putrajaya Lake, Masjid Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin (Masjid Besi), Putajaya Botanical Garden, Putajaya Bridge, Putrajaya Wetlands Park, Seri Perdana, dan Putrajaya International Convention Centre sebagai produk pelancongan di Putrajaya serta dikategorikan lokasi tersebut kepada beberapa jenis pelancongan.

Selain itu, kajian Analisis Bahasa dalam Iklan Media Sosial di Malaysia yang dijalankan oleh (Jacob et al., 2022) tidak berfokus kepada papan tanda pengiklanan namun lebih memberi tumpuan kepada kesalahan bahasa dalam iklan di media sosial seperti instagram, tiktok dan twitter. Tujuan kajian ini dilakukan adalah untuk menganalisis tahap-tahap bahasa di dalam iklan media sosial dan mengkaji kesan penggunaan tahap bahasa pengiklanan terhadap sikap pembelian pengguna. Kajian ini telah menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif iaitu analisis kandungan dan temubual mendalam. Analisis kajian menggunakan buku kod untuk mengukur data atau maklumat di dalam iklan Milo berdasarkan perspektif linguistik. Kajian ini berbeza dengan kajian ini kerana kajian mereka lebih berfokus kepada pengiklanan di media sosial manakala kajian ini lebih kepada menganalisis persepsi pelancong terhadap kesalahan papan tanda di Muar, Johor. Persamaan hanyalah di bahagian analisis kesalahan tatabahasa dari aspek linguistik.

Kajian seterusnya ialah kajian yang dilakukan oleh (Wan, 2022) iaitu bertajuk *Accessibiliy of tourist Signage at Heritage Sites: An Application Of The Universal Design Principles.* Kebolehcapaian papan tanda pelancong telah dikaji dalam penyelidikan ini dengan menggunakan *stakeholder theory, concepts of tourist signage,* dan *universal design (UD)*. Seramai 28 orang pelancong yang pernah mengunjungi tapak warisan di Macao telah ditemu bual. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa tanpa mengira perbezaan individu dari segi keupayaan fizikal dan ciri-ciri peribadi, papan tanda pelancong dianggap penting oleh responden untuk mengetahui arah ke tarikan pelancongan dan kemudahan perkhidmatan. Papan tanda ini amat penting terutamanya bagi lawatan ke tapak warisan di Macao yang memerlukan pelancong melalui beberapa lorong termasuk bagi mereka yang mempunyai keupayaan fizikal yang lebih lemah seperti orang kurang upaya, warga emas, serta ibu yang membawa anak kecil. Melalui temu bual tersebut, kekuatan dan kelemahan papan tanda pelancong telah dikenal pasti, dan tahap kebolehcapaian untuk pelancong dinilai berdasarkan prinsip UD. Dapatan menunjukkan bahawa kekuatan dan kelemahan tersebut ada yang mematuhi atau tidak mematuhi prinsip UD dalam pelbagai cara dan memberi kesan kepada pengalaman pelancongan, sikap, serta hasil tingkah laku pelancong. Cadangan praktikal turut dikemukakan.

Selain itu, Kajian oleh Luo and Huang (2025) yang bertajuk "*Translation Strategies of Tourism and Culture Promotion Signs in the Context of Communication Translation*" telah mendapati bahawa kualiti terjemahan papan tanda pelancongan dan promosi budaya memainkan peranan yang signifikan dalam membentuk persepsi pelancong antarabangsa terhadap sesebuah destinasi. Analisis ke atas sampel papan tanda di kawasan pelancongan budaya menunjukkan bahawa wujudnya tiga isu utama yang memberi kesan kepada keberkesanan penyampaian maklumat. Pertama, kecenderungan penggunaan terjemahan literal tanpa penyesuaian konteks budaya telah mengakibatkan mesej menjadi kaku, tidak semula jadi, dan kadangkala mengelirukan pelancong. Kedua, kelemahan dari segi linguistik seperti kesalahan tatabahasa, ejaan, dan pemilihan kosa kata yang tidak tepat telah menjejaskan kredibiliti destinasi tersebut di mata pengunjung. Ketiga, terdapat kekurangan dalam aspek penyesuaian kandungan kepada latar belakang pengetahuan pelancong, contohnya kegagalan memberikan penerangan tambahan untuk istilah atau rujukan budaya tempatan yang kurang dikenali oleh pelancong antarabangsa.

Penemuan ini mengesahkan bahawa walaupun terdapat usaha untuk menyediakan papan tanda dalam bahasa dwibahasa atau pelbagai bahasa, strategi terjemahan yang digunakan masih belum mencapai tahap komunikasi lintas budaya yang optimum.

Bagi menangani isu tersebut, kajian ini mencadangkan beberapa strategi terjemahan berasaskan pendekatan terjemahan komunikasi. Pertama, strategi penyesuaian makna (*meaning adaptation*) perlu dilaksanakan bagi memastikan mesej yang disampaikan relevan dengan norma linguistik dan budaya bahasa sasaran, sambil mengekalkan maklumat inti teks asal. Kedua, strategi pengayaan maklumat (*information enrichment*) disarankan untuk memperjelas rujukan budaya yang unik, misalnya dengan menambah penerangan ringkas atau penjelasan kontekstual. Ketiga, penggunaan struktur ayat yang ringkas, padat, dan mudah diingati harus diutamakan bagi memastikan keberkesanan komunikasi di lokasi fizikal. Keempat, penglibatan penterjemah profesional atau penutur jati dalam proses semakan akhir amat penting untuk mengelakkan kesilapan yang boleh mencemarkan imej bandar. Dapatan kajian menegaskan bahawa papan tanda pelancongan bukan sekadar alat penyampaian maklumat, tetapi juga merupakan medium diplomasi budaya yang mampu memperkukuh hubungan antara budaya dan meningkatkan tahap pengantarabangsaan sesebuah destinasi. Justeru, pelaksanaan strategi terjemahan komunikatif yang terancang diyakini dapat meningkatkan kualiti landskap bahasa bandar, menyokong kelestarian warisan budaya, dan memacu daya saing industri pelancongan di peringkat global.

Secara keseluruhannya, kajian-kajian lepas telah mempamerkan kajian yang menjurus kepada kajian kesalahan penggunaan bahasa Melayu dalam papan iklan perniagaan, papan tanda di jalan raya. Hanya kajian yang dilakukan oleh (Ab Razak & Ahmad, 2021)adalah lebih berfokus kepada penggunaan *User-Generated Content* dalam promosi pelancong di Putrajaya. Oleh sebab wujudnya kelompangan dalam kajian lepas, maka kajian ini meneliti persepsi pelancong terhadap papan tanda di Muar , Johor. Kajian ini mempunyai dua objektif iaitu mengenal pasti kesalahan penggunaan bahasa pada papan tanda perniagaan dari aspek linguistik dan juga menjalankan tinjauan terhadap persepsi pelancong luar Muar berhubung kesalahan papan tanda yang terdapat di Bandar Muar. melihat atau meneliti persepsi pelancong luar terhadap penggunaan bahasa dalam papan tanda ini.

## 3. METODOLOGI KAJIAN

Untuk mencapai objektif kajian ini, pendekatan kualitatif telah digunakan bagi mengenal pasti kesalahan papan tanda di Muar dari aspek linguistik dan juga menganalisis persepsi pelancong terhadap penggunaan papan tanda. Untuk mengenal pasti kesalahan papan tanda dari aspek linguistik, pengkaji telah berfokus kepada papan tanda perniagaan di sekitar Bandar Muar, Johor iaitu seperti perniagaan kedai stor, kedai pakaian, kedai gajet, kedai buku, klinik, kedai jam, kedai makan, kedai perkhidmatan gunting rambut, pasar raya, kedai emas, kedai pembekal makanan serta penjagaan kucing. Bagi mengenal pasti kesalahan papan tanda dari aspek linguistik, iaitu kesalahan tatabahasa, kesalahan yang sering timbul adalah seperti kesalahan dari segi frasa, istilah, kesalahan ejaan, kesalahan pembentukan kata dan percampuran kod, kajian ini dibuat secara kajian lapangan dan data diambil secara rawak di Bandar Muar. Bagi menganalisis persepsi pelancong terhadap kesan kesalahan papan tanda pula, kajian ini telah menjalankan sesi temu bual kepada pelancong luar yakni dari kawasan luar Johor seperti Singapura, Selangor, Melaka, Negeri Sembilan dan wilayah Kuala Lumpur. Pelancong ini dipilih secara rawak semasa melakukan kerja lapangan di bandar Muar.

## 4. HASIL KAJIAN DAN PERBINCANGAN

Dapatan kajian ini dibahagikan kepada dua bahagian. Bahagian pertama merupakan dapatan kajian bagi kesalahan bahasa pada papan tanda perniagaan yang terdapat di Muar, Johor manakala bahagian kedua pula memaparkan hasil temu bual antara lima responden iaitu pelancong luar yang melawat ke Bandar Muar, Johor.

### 4.1 Kesalahan Penggunaan Bahasa dalam Papan Tanda Perniagaan

Antara kesalahan penggunaan bahasa yang digunakan pada papan iklan premis perniagaan di Bandar Muar, Johor terdiri daripada empat jenis kategori kesalahan tatabahasa iaitu kesalahan dari segi ejaan, istilah, frasa dan percampuran kod. Sebagai contoh Sen Fatt Department Setor, Gedong Fesyen, Kelinik Gadget dan Tanjong Mas yang mempunyai kesalahan dari segi ejaan. Manakala Jurugigi Kok Kwok Soon, Pusat Jam Cahaya yang mempunyai kesalahan dari segi penggunaan istilah. Seterusnya, ialah premis perniagaan Hwa Sing Gunting Rambut, Kedai Harga Patut 2021 yang mempunyai kesalahan dari segi morfologi yang terdiri daripada kesalahan imbuhan, kata nama khas dan pelanggaran hukum D-M. Jadual 1 menunjukkan kesalahan bahasa pada papan tanda di Bandar Muar, Johor.

Jadual 1. Jenis Kesalahan Bahasa Papan Papan Tanda Perniagaan di Bandar Muar, Johor

| Jenis Kesalahan | Contoh Kesalahan | Pembetulan |
|---|---|---|
| Ejaan | 1. Sen Fatt Department Stor<br>2. Gedong Fesyen<br>3. Kelinik Gadget<br>4. Tanjong Mas | 1. Sen Fatt Department Stor<br>2. Gedung Fesyen<br>3. Klinik Gajet |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | 5. Pisang Goreng Panaszz<br>6. Satay Gemuk's | 4. Tanjung Mas<br>5. Pisang Goreng Panas<br>6. Satay Gemuk |
| Istilah | 1. Jurugigi Kok Kwok Soon<br>2. Pusat Jam Cahaya<br>3. Terminal Sup & Tomyam, Mi Bandung Muo Ori | 1. Klinik Pakar Pergigian Kok Kwok Soon<br>2. Kedai Jam Cahaya<br>3. Warung Sup, Tomyam, Mi Bandung Muar Asli |
| Frasa | 1. Emas Sri Maya<br>2. Untuk disewa | 1. Kedai Emas Sri Maya<br>2. Kedai untuk disewa |
| Percampuran Kod | 1. Klinik Public<br>2. Klinik MyFamily<br>3. Tiara Collection<br>4. Danif Tomyam Seafood | 1. Klinik Awam<br>2. Klinik Keluargaku<br>3. Koleksi Tiara<br>4. Kedai Makanan Laut dan Tomyam Danif |

### 4.1.1 Kesalahan Ejaan

Tidak dapat dinafikan bahawa kesalahan ejaan sememangnya berlaku pada pelbagai perkara dan tidak terkecuali dalam penggunaan bahasa pada papan iklan perniagaan. Berdasarkan pemerhatian yang telah dilakukan, kesalahan ejaan ini terus berlaku kerana sesetengah peniaga tidak menggantikan papan iklan perniagaan mereka yang masih menggunakan sistem ejaan yang lama dengan papan iklan perniagaan baru yang menggunakan sistem ejaan yang baru kerana memerlukan kos perbelanjaan untuk pemasangan papan iklan baru dengan harga yang tinggi. Berdasarkan kepada kajian yang telah dijalankan, terdapat empat buah premis perniagaan yang mempunyai kesalahan ejaan pada papan tanda perniagaan mereka iaitu Sen Fatt Department Setor, Gedong Fesyen, Kelinik Gadget dan Tanjong Mas.

Kesalahan ejaan yang pertama terdapat pada perkataan “setor”. Kamus Dewan Edisi Keempat, menyatakan bahawa perkataan “stor” merupakan imbuhan memasukkan atau menyerahkan sesuatu yg distorkan. Dengan kata lain, kesalahan ejaan yang berlaku ini berlaku disebabkan oleh kesalahan mengeja perkataan pinjaman seperti perkataan ‘stor’ yang disalah eja sebagai ‘setor’. Selain itu, kesalahan ejaan yang dapat dikesan ini ialah pada perkataan "gedong". Perkataan "gedong" ini telah disalah eja daripada perkataan yang sebenarnya iaitu "gedung". Menurut pola keselarasan vokal, seharusnya perkataan "gedong" haruslah dieja sebagai "gedung". Hal ini kerana vokal "e" perlulah bertemu dengan vokal "u" sebelumya mengikut pola keselarasan vokal. Penerangan di bawah menunjukkan kesalahan dan pembetulannya yang sepatutnya pada papan iklan perniagaan premis ini. Selain itu, keselarasan vokal juga dipadankan bertujuan untuk memberi pemahaman yang lebih jelas tentang ejaan yang sebenar bagi perkataan "gedung". Seterusnya, kesalahan ejaan bagi “Kelinik Gadget” ditukarkan kepada “Klinik Gajet”. Akhir sekali, kesalahan dari segi penggunaan ejaan bagi Tanjong Mas masih menggunakan bahasa Melayu lama, sedangkan Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka telah menetapkan bahasa Melayu moden dengan menukarkan “Tanjong” kepada “Tanjung”.

### 4.1.2 Kesalahan Morfologi

Kesalahan morfologi merujuk kepada sebarang bentuk ketidakpatuhan atau penyimpangan dalam pembentukan kata yang melibatkan struktur dalaman kata, termasuk proses pengimbuhan, penggandaan, pemajmukan, dan perubahan bentuk kata mengikut fungsi tatabahasa. Dalam konteks bahasa Melayu, kesalahan morfologi berlaku apabila unsur kata tidak dibentuk mengikut kaedah yang ditetapkan oleh sistem morfologi bahasa tersebut. Contohnya, penggunaan imbuhan yang tidak tepat seperti *memerbahaya* (sepatutnya *membahayakan*), penggandaan yang tidak wajar seperti *guru-gurus* (sepatutnya *guru-guru*), atau pemajmukan yang salah seperti *kereta-api* (sepatutnya *kereta api*).

Kesalahan ini sering berlaku akibat pengaruh bahasa lain, kekeliruan terhadap peraturan imbuhan, atau kurangnya penguasaan terhadap bentuk kata baku. Dalam kajian linguistik, analisis kesalahan morfologi membantu memahami tahap penguasaan bahasa seseorang, mengenal pasti sumber kesalahan, serta merancang strategi pembetulan. Selain itu, kesalahan morfologi juga boleh memberi kesan terhadap kejelasan makna dan kefahaman dalam komunikasi, terutamanya dalam penulisan rasmi atau akademik. Secara ringkasnya, kesalahan morfologi adalah pelanggaran terhadap sistem pembentukan kata yang sah dalam sesuatu bahasa. Memahami dan mengenal pasti kesalahan ini penting bagi memastikan ketepatan, kejelasan, dan profesionalisme dalam penggunaan bahasa.

Daripada kajian yang telah dijalankan, terdapat dua jenis kesalahan morfologi yang dapat dikesan pada papan iklan premis perniagaan di Bandar Muar, Johor. Dua jenis kesalahan tersebut ialah kesalahan daripada aspek penggunaan kata nama khas dan aspek pembentukan kata terbitan yang berimbuhan apitan yang terdapat pada papan iklan premis perniagaan yang telah dikaji. Terdapat banyak premis perniagaan yang tidak meletakkan imbuhan kerana mereka tidak cakna dengan kepentingan tatabahasa yang betul dalam pengiklanan. Misalnya, dalam pengiklanan sebuah pasar raya memaparkan “Kedai harga patut 2021” sepatutnya istilah “patut” ini memerlukan imbuhan apitan “ber…an”. Oleh itu, “Kedai harga patut 2021” sepatutnya dieja dengan “Kedai harga berpatutan 2021”. Seterusnya, kesalahan dalam penggunaan kata nama khas dapat dikesan dalam pengiklanan “Hwa Sing Gunting Rambut”. Sepatutnya papan iklan ini dieja dengan “Kedai Gunting Rambut Hwa Sing”. Berdasarkan kepada kesalahan tersebut, jelas bahawa terdapat papan iklan perniagaan yang mempunyai kesalahan bagi kata nama khas iaitu menggugurkan kata nama "kedai" pada papan tanda perniagaannya. Oleh itu, kata nama khas bagi kedai-kedai ini tidak lengkap kerana tidak dilengkapkan dengan kata nama bagi menukarkannya kepada kata nama khas. Seharusnya pada setiap papan-papan iklan perniagaan ini perlulah diletakkan kata nama "kedai" bagi merujuk jenis premis perniagaan.

### 4.1.3 Kesalahan Frasa

Kesalahan frasa merujuk kepada kesilapan dalam pembinaan unit bahasa yang terdiri daripada dua perkataan atau lebih yang membentuk satu makna tertentu mengikut peraturan tatabahasa. Dalam bahasa Melayu, frasa boleh dibahagikan kepada beberapa jenis seperti frasa nama, frasa kerja, frasa adjektif, frasa sendi nama, dan frasa adverba. Kesalahan frasa berlaku apabila struktur frasa tidak mematuhi susunan kata yang betul, penggunaan imbuhan yang tidak tepat, atau gabungan kata yang menyalahi tatabahasa baku. Contohnya, frasa *mempunyai masa lapang yang banyak* adalah betul, tetapi frasa *banyak mempunyai masa lapang* boleh dianggap janggal bergantung pada konteks. Kesalahan frasa juga melibatkan penggunaan kata yang berlebihan (*akan pergi ke ke sekolah*), penyusunan yang terbalik (*saya buku baca*), atau penggunaan unsur yang tidak selaras (*mereka adalah pandai* – sepatutnya *mereka pandai*).

Dalam penulisan dan pertuturan formal, kesalahan frasa memberi kesan negatif terhadap kejelasan mesej dan kredibiliti penutur atau penulis. Dari sudut linguistik, analisis kesalahan frasa membantu mengenal pasti kelemahan dalam penguasaan struktur sintaksis, di samping memberikan panduan untuk pembetulan. Secara keseluruhan, kesalahan frasa merupakan pelanggaran terhadap peraturan pembinaan frasa yang sah dan tepat. Penguasaan frasa yang betul amat penting untuk memastikan komunikasi lisan dan tulisan jelas, tepat, serta berkesan.

Penggunaan frasa yang tepat sememangnya penting bagi menghasilkan papan tanda iklan premis yang baik. Hal ini dikatakan demikian kerana bahasa pengiklanan dikaitkan dengan fungsi-fungsi bahasa bagi memastikan kandungan mesejnya lebih terserlah kepada pengguna seperti yang dinyatakan oleh Halliday (1973). Malah, dapat kita lihat segelintir pemilik premis perniagaan sewenang-wenangnya menggunakan frasa yang tidak tepat tanpa rasa bersalah. Antara kesalahan frasa yang dikesan oleh pengkaji yang pertama adalah “Emas Sri Maya”. Sebaliknya, penggunaan frasa yang betul adalah “Kedai Emas Sri Maya”. Hal ini dikatakan demikian kerana kenyataan papan iklan tersebut tidak menyatakan secara terperinci perkataan “kedai” yang merupakan frasa nama.

Seterusnya ialah kesalahan bagi papan iklan “Untuk Disewa”. Secara jelas, dapat kita lihat disini, frasa nama iaitu “Kedai” tidak diletakkan selepas frasa “Untuk disewa”. Dengan itu, pengguna atau pembaca mengalami kekeliruan terdapat papan iklan tersebut. Sebagai contoh, apakah subjek yang ingin disewa. Justeru itu, penggunaan frasa yang tepat pada papan iklan tersebut adalah “Kedai untuk disewa”. Natijahnya, hasil daripada kesalahan frasa ini menunjukkan bahawa pihak premis perniagaan tidak peka terhadap penggunaan kata yang betul sekali gus akan merosakkan bahasa melayu itu sendiri.

### 4.1.4 Kesalahan Percampuran Kod

Percampurann kod merujuk kepada fenomena penggunaan dua atau lebih bahasa atau variasi dalam ujaran atau wacana, sama ada dalam bentuk lisan mahupun tulisan. Dalam konteks bahasa Melayu, percampuran berlaku apabila penutur mencampurkan unsur bahasa Melayu dengan bahasa lain seperti bahasa Inggeris, Arab, Mandarin atau dialek tempatan, sama ada peringkat kata, frasa mahupun ayat. Fenomena ini berbeza daripada pertukaran kod kerana percampuran kod berlaku secara serentak dalam satu struktur ayat, manakala pertukaran kod biasanya melibatkan peralihan bahasa antara ayat atau wacana.

Dari sudut sosiolinguistik, percampuran kod dianggap strategi komunikasi yang bersifat kreatif dan fleksibel tetapi dalam konteks formal seperti penulisan akademik atau dokumen rasmi, ia dilihat sebagai kesalahan bahasa yang menjejaskan keseragaman dan kejelasan. Kajian mengenai percampuran kod membantu memahami dinamika penggunaan bahasa dalam masyarakat majmuk, khususnya di Malaysia. Umum mengetahui bahawa bahasa Inggeris dan bahasa Melayu merupakan bahasa dominan yang digunakan dalam pertuturan seharian rakyat Malaysia. Malahan, seseorang yang menguasai bahasa Inggeris dipandang tinggi kerana pada masa kini dunia ekonomi dan perdagangan lebih menekankan penggunaan bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa perantaraan dalam urusan perdagangan. Justeru itu, perniagaan mengambil inisiatif untuk melonjakkan perniagaan mereka ke peringkat yang lebih tinggi.

Menurut Bernama (2024), penyalahgunaan bahasa Melayu pada papan tanda sering dianggap normal kerana masyarakat kurang peduli terhadap kesalahan ini. Selain itu, penguatkuasaan yang lemah dan tidakpedulian juga turut menyumbang kepada isu kesalahan penggunaan papan tanda ini. Akibatnya, persepsi pelancong luar terhadap ketirisan ejaan seperti ini boleh mencacatkan imej profesional dan keaslian warisan Muar. Berdasarkan kajian yang dijalankan, dapatan ini mendapati banyak premis perniagaan menggunakan percampuran kod pada papan iklan premis perniagaan mereka bukan sahaja dalam perniagaan malahan kesalahan ini juga berlaku dalam servis dan perkhidmatan. Salah satunya ialah “Klinik Public” dan “Klinik MyFamily” yang sepatutnya perlu digantikan dengan "Klinik Awam" dan "Klinik Keluargaku". Istilah ini terlihat sangat remeh tetapi memberi impak besar dalam sektor perniagaan. Seterusnya, perniagaan "Tiara Collection" dan "Danif Tomyam Seafood" seharusnya ditukar kepada "Koleksi Tiara" dan "Kedai Makanan Laut dan Tomyam Danif". Percampuran kod yang digunakan telah mewujudkan bahasa rojak secara meluas dalam masyarakat kerana papan iklan juga memainkan peranan penting dalam konsep ilmu tatabahasa. Penggunaan tatabahasa yang salah menyumbang kepada penghakisan ketulenan bahasa Melayu dalam kalangan generasi Z.

## 4.2 Persepsi Pelancong Luar Terhadap Kesan Kesalahan Papan Tanda Di Bandar Muar

Hasil dapatan menunjukkan terdapat beberapa kesan yang telah dikenal pasti melalui temu bual bersama lima pelancong luar yang datang ke Bandar Muar. Antara kesan yang dikenal pasti adalah kekeliruan makna, persepsi terhadap profesionalisme, ketidakmesraan bahasa tempatan, pengaruh kualiti bahasa terhadap imej negara dan penggunaan istilah yang konsisten.

### 4.2.1 Kekeliruan Makna

*"Saya nampak satu papan arah ke 'Cultural Hall' tapi bila sampai, itu rupanya dewan komuniti. Kenapa tak guna istilah yang betul?" – Pelancong 2*

Dapatan ini menunjukkan berlakunya kekeliruan makna akibat terjemahan literal atau penggunaan istilah yang tidak sesuai dengan konteks budaya tempatan. Istilah seperti "*Cultural Hall*" membawa konotasi rasmi atau tempat pertunjukan budaya dalam konteks antarabangsa, sedangkan yang dimaksudkan sebenarnya hanyalah "dewan komuniti" – tempat perjumpaan biasa penduduk setempat. Kekeliruan ini bukan sahaja boleh mengelirukan pelancong, malah memberi gambaran kurang profesional terhadap pengurusan maklumat pelancongan. Pelancong luar negara yang bergantung sepenuhnya kepada papan tanda sebagai panduan akan menyimpulkan bahawa destinasi tersebut tidak bersedia untuk pelawat antarabangsa.

### 4.2.2 Persepsi terhadap pengurusan pelancongan

*"Kalau benda kecil macam ni pun salah, saya rasa pengurusan pelancongan belum matang." – Pelancong 4*

Pernyataan ini mencerminkan bagaimana kesalahan kecil seperti terjemahan yang silap, kesalahan ejaan atau kekaburan bahasa boleh memberi impak besar terhadap persepsi pelancong terhadap pengurusan pelancongan sesuatu destinasi. Bagi pelancong, mutu penyampaian maklumat dalam bahasa adalah antara indikator kepada tahap kesediaan dan kematangan industri pelancongan setempat. Kesalahan bahasa bukan hanya dianggap sebagai kecuaian teknikal, malah ia dilihat sebagai kegagalan menyampaikan pengalaman pelancongan yang berkualiti tinggi. Isu ini menunjukkan perlunya pemantauan berterusan terhadap bahan promosi dan maklumat awam. Bahasa bukan hanya alat komunikasi, tetapi juga melambangkan reputasi sesebuah kawasan pelancongan. Kecuaian kecil boleh mengakibatkan pelancong hilang kepercayaan terhadap destinasi berkenaan.

### 4.2.3 Ketidakmesraan Bahasa Tempatan

*"Saya cuba baca papan tanda tu tapi semuanya dalam Bahasa Melayu. Kalau tak ada versi Inggeris, pelancong luar susah nak faham." – Pelancong 1*

Ketiadaan terjemahan dalam bahasa antarabangsa seperti Bahasa Inggeris menunjukkan bahawa sesetengah destinasi pelancongan belum mengamalkan prinsip akses linguistik yang inklusif. Walaupun Bahasa Melayu adalah bahasa kebangsaan, pelancongan merupakan sektor global yang memerlukan adaptasi multilingual. Kekangan bahasa ini boleh menyebabkan pelancong merasa terpinggir atau tidak dialu-alukan, malah berisiko mengurangkan kebolehpasaran sesuatu destinasi kepada pelancong asing. Oleh itu, dasar penyediaan maklumat pelancongan dalam sekurang-kurangnya dua bahasa utama, selain menyediakan penterjemahan dalam bahasa tambahan berdasarkan demografi pelancong.

### 4.2.4 Pengaruh Kualiti Bahasa Terhadap Imej Negara

*"Bila saya nampak papan tanda penuh kesalahan ejaan dan ayat pelik, saya tertanya – ini standard negara ke?" – Pelancong 5*

Mutu bahasa dalam papan tanda bukan sekadar soal teknikal, ia membentuk persepsi pelancong terhadap imej negara secara keseluruhan. Bahasa mencerminkan standard pendidikan, profesionalisme, dan tahap kesediaan sesebuah negara menerima pelancong. Kesalahan bahasa yang berleluasa memberi imej tidak cermat, tidak bersedia, dan tidak menghormati pelawat. Pelancong membawa pulang bukan sekadar gambar, tetapi pengalaman termasuklah pengalaman linguistik. Keperluan mengiktiraf bahasa sebagai elemen strategik dalam nation branding dan pelancongan. Ini juga menyokong kepentingan penyelarasan antara Kementerian Pelancongan, DBP dan Pihak Berkuasa Tempatan (PBT) dalam memantau papan tanda awam.

#### 4.2.5 Keperluan Penggunaan Istilah yang Konsisten

*"Ada tempat tulis 'information centre', tempat lain 'tourist info', dan ada juga 'pelancongan info' – semua macam tak seragam." – pelancong 3*

Kekeliruan juga boleh berpunca daripada ketidakkonsistenan istilah yang digunakan pada papan tanda. Tanpa garis panduan standard, penterjemahan dan format boleh berbeza dari satu kawasan ke kawasan lain telah menjadikan pelancong sukar untuk mengenal pasti lokasi penting seperti pusat informasi, kaunter tiket, tandas, dan sebagainya. Konsistensi istilah sangat penting bagi navigasi pelancong dan standardisasi pengalaman pelancongan. Oleh itu, perlu adanya garis panduan terjemahan rasmi yang digunapakai di seluruh tempat destinasi pelancongan utama. Para pakar bahasa dan juga bahagian pelancongan haruslah berganding bahu agar penggunaan istilah yang konsisten haruslah dilakukan supaya tidak mewujudkan kekeliruan dalam kalangan pelancong.

## 5. KESIMPULAN

Dalam bahagian ini, kajian menyimpulkan hasil dapatan yang diperoleh daripada kajian penyelidikan ini. Hasil kajian telah menunjukkan terdapat empat jenis kesalahan utama yang dikenal pasti pada penggunaan papan tanda terutamanya papan tanda iklan perniagaan. Isu kesalahan dalam papan tanda iklan atau *signage* dalam Bahasa Melayu adalah bukan isu yang asing lagi. Sebagai destinasi yang menggabungkan elemen moden dan klasik, papan tanda yang silap ejaan boleh menimbulkan keraguan. Tambahan pula, kesilapan ini juga menyukarkan pelancong asing yang bergantung pada bahasa dan susun atur yang jelas dan orientasi. Selain itu, setiap persepsi pelancong asing terhadap penggunaan papan tanda ini haruslah dipandang serius. Hal ini kerana Bandar Muar merupakan bandar yang mempunyai keunikannya yang tersendiri dan keunikan ini memberikan daya tarikan kepada pelancong luar untuk datang ke Bandar Muar dan melihat sendiri bandar ini dengan pengalaman yang indah dan tidak mampu dilupakan. Oleh kerana kajian ini hanya tertumpu kepada kesalahan pada papan tanda perniagaan di Bandar Muar, Johor sahaja, maka diharapkan kajian pada akan datang boleh melihat skop yang lebih luas lagi bagi melihat kesalahan bahasa pada papan perniagaan di tempat lain.

## 6. PENGHARGAAN

Kajian ini tidak dapat dilakukan tanpa kerjasama daripada setiap peniaga dan juga responden yang terlibat dalam kajian ini. Sekalung perhargaan kepada setiap individu yang telah ditemu bual bagi mendapatkan data kajian ini.

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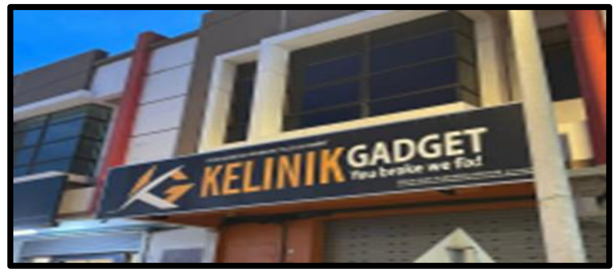





**Jenis Kesalahan Ejaan Dalam Papan Tanda Perniagaan Bandar Muar, Johor (Jadual 1)**



Jenis kesalahan Frasa pada papan tanda perniagaan di Bandar Muar, Johor (Jadual 1)

Jenis kesalahan istilah pada papan tanda perniagaan di Bandar Muar, Johor (Jadual 1)

ARTICLE

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# Case Study: Challenges Facing Kuala Lumpur's *Pasar Seni*

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## ABSTRACT

Traditional markets around the world, including *Pasar Seni* (Central Market) in Kuala Lumpur, serve as vital cultural and tourism assets. However, they are increasingly challenged by modern retail formats, leading to a decline in visitor shopping experiences and hindering their potential as authentic cultural hubs. This study aimed to identify the challenges affecting visitor experience at Pasar Seni. In qualitative research design, semi-structured interviews were employed with nine visitors, five local and four international. Findings reveal that reactive trader engagement, limited opportunities for deeper cultural conversations, inconsistent hospitality standards, concerns regarding pricing consistency and fairness, and environmental discomforts (e.g., crowding, noise) significantly impact visitor experiences. These barriers hinder the meaningful social interactions that such cultural hubs are meant to provide. The study recommends strategic hospitality training for traders, transparent pricing methods, and environmental improvements for Central Market Sdn. Bhd. and similar markets in nature. A notable limitation of this research was the inability to include trader perspectives, as permission for their interviews was not granted. Hence, future research should integrate trader perspectives and conduct comparative studies to ensure Pasar Seni's long-term cultural and economic sustainability.

Keywords: Challenges; Pasar Seni; Traditional Market; Visitor Experience

Article Classification: Case Study

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Traditional markets are not only for commercial transactions but also important as social and cultural spaces that represent the community's traditional values (Cahya et al., 2025). This market has unique features that create authentic experiences, distinguishing them from modern retail environments. In Malaysia, traditional markets serve more than just shopping purposes. It’s lifeless representations of the country's rich ethnic diversity and long-standing artisanal traditions that need to be preserved. Effective management of these markets presents a significant opportunity to enhance local economic development. Notable examples of these important cultural and economic centers can be found throughout the nation, such as the Pasar Besar Siti Khadijah in Kelantan, Chow Kit Market in Kuala Lumpur, and Kuantan Central Market in Pahang. Among these, Kuala Lumpur's Pasar Seni, also known as Central Market, stands out as a quintessential example found. Indeed, *Pasar Seni* has now emerged as a top tourist spot in Malaysia.

Pasar Seni Kuala Lumpur is an excellent example of a cultural marketplace. In 1888, the British colonial government established a modest wet market to serve locals and tin miners, which was originally bustling with fresh vegetables and everyday essentials. As Kuala Lumpur rapidly urbanized and expanded economically, Pasar Seni diversified its offerings beyond fresh produce to include dry goods and other products, reflecting the city's growth, according to The Malaysian Reserve (2019). Its current recognizable Art Deco-style building, built in 1937, not only increased space and hygiene but also represented Kuala Lumpur's modernization aspirations, establishing Pasar Seni's place as an important commercial and social hub. This new structure was a considerable advancement, creating a more organized and visually appealing trading atmosphere.

However, in the past few years, the activity of traditional marketplaces, including Pasar Seni, has begun to shift significantly as a result of the rise of modern markets. Yaqin et al. (2023) stated that these contemporary rivals, backed by sophisticated management, excellent facilities, and pricing certainty, create a severe competitive challenge to established markets. This external pressure makes the urgent need for traditional markets to utilize their distinctive qualities, notably the authentic cultural experiences, in order to remain competitive in an ever-changing retail marketplace.

Suyanto (2023) emphasizes that traditional markets face challenges such as the rising influence of modern markets on their current state, leading to a declining trend and posing the potential to disrupt the traditional market economy. This competitive pressure is exacerbated by the fact that consumers tend to shift towards modern markets due to their proximity and the provided facilities, which offer greater convenience, as highlighted by research on the impact of modern markets on the existence of traditional markets.

Consequently, despite continuous efforts to revitalize Pasar Seni and increase its appeal as a vibrant cultural tourism destination, a significant internal research issue remains: studies suggest a decline in visitor shopping experiences (Patwary & Omar,2020). This drop is attributed to a perceived lack of respectful communication, asevidenced by less hospitality and a less welcoming environment highlighted by Kim et al. (2020). This issue is demonstrated by accounts of rushed interactions and insufficient, unclear product information, indicating a potential decline of the authentic social exchange that traditional markets, particularly those catering to niche tourism and special interest tourism, are expected to provide (Wongleedee, 2015). This authentic social exchange offered a real experience in which visitors not only purchase items but also engage in meaningful cultural discussions. The decline in customer experience has a direct impact on tourist satisfaction. Supported by González-Rodríguez et al. (2023), the decline of authentic exchange hinders Malaysia's efforts to promote cultural experiences and to maintain its competitive advantage in the global tourist sector. These are important for attracting niche travellers by providing the visitors with the opportunity to engage with Malaysian culture and create unique memories, leading to more profound and unforgettable experiences.

There is a call to intervene in Pasar Seni due to a decline in the overall visitor shopping experience, attributed to a generally perceived lack of respectful communication, hospitality, and genuine social exchange (Patwary & Omar, 2020; Kim et al., 2020; Wongleedee, 2015). However, a significant gap exists, as no recent and granular-level study specifically identifies and systematically documents the prevailing, actionable issues faced by visitors. While studies acknowledge the signs (e.g., rushed interactions, disjointed information), research that goes beyond these generic associations to categorize the entire range of distinct operations, interactions, and environmental issues from the visitor's perspective in Pasar Seni does not exist.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section provides empirical underpinnings for understanding the complicated nature of visitor engagement, as well as the challenges that traditional marketplaces face. It summarizes previous research on visitors' experience, provides the main theoretical lens of Social Exchange Theory, and explains how traditional market factors impact visitor views.

Ahmad et al. (2023) higlight that the Social Exchange Theory (SET) believes that human social behaviour is essentially an exchange process motivated by people's conscious or unconscious attempts to optimise gains and minimise costs in their interactions. According to SET, people weigh potential rewards (it may be both tangible and intangible) against costs (such as time, effort, discomfort, or financial investment). The theory suggests that for a relationship or interaction to be successful and sustained, the outcomes must be positive, meaning the rewards must outweigh the costs, often generating an anticipation of reciprocal beneficial acts. In the context of your research, the visitor's shopping experience at Pasar Seni is viewed as a series of social and commercial trades where favorable outcomes (positive experiences) depend on the traders providing rewards that meet or exceed the visitors' expenditures.

### 2.1. Visitor Experience in Traditional Markets

The primary competitive differences of the traditional market from modern retail are fundamentally rooted in the authentic visitor experience through social and cultural interaction. It is a human-centered rather than infrastructure-based approach (Tumanggor et al., 2023). Positive social interaction, especially in communities with strong cultural values, is built on an essential ethical framework (Ali et al., 2022). This quality of engagement is not spontaneous, but is underpinned by local moral values, such as the Malaysian ideal of 'Adab' and related Islamic values of hospitality, honesty, and kindness, which shape trader conduct according to Sohirin (2017) and Syaifudin et al. (2021). Effective communication, which requires kindness, attentive listening, and excellent character, is essential to this exchange (Tankovic, 2021). Udjianto et al., (2021) emphasize that when traders adhere to these standards, they provide favourable experiences for guests because honesty builds credibility, hospitality creates a welcoming environment, and respect creates trust which also supported by Azahar & Jusoh (2019).

Traditional markets captivate visitors through their authenticity and immersive cultural experience, serving as a significant source of Memorable Cultural Tourism Experiences (MCTEs) (Seyfi et al., 2019). It offers a genuine window into local life, fostering rich cultural exchange through direct engagement with community members, emphasized by Aliyah et al. (2020). The lively social atmosphere and direct engagement with traders are essential, as the art of bargaining can transform a simple purchase into a memorable cultural exchange, also highlighted by Syaifudin et al. (2021). Furthermore, the perception of authenticity significantly affects tourists' experience and behavior; while existential authenticity influences satisfaction, constructive authenticity, or shared creation of cultural knowledge, impacts both satisfaction and loyalty (Tian, D., 2022). These markets are also treasure troves of unique products, ranging from handicrafts and artworks to local cuisine.

Not only that, Seyfi et al. (2019) mentioned again that the role of local food is indispensable, offering authentic culinary experiences and opportunities for sensory and cultural immersion, which often involve co-creation activities through interaction and customization. This multi-faceted appeal aligns with the evolving role of traditional markets as leisure destinations and vital social gathering places (Azahar & Jusoh, 2019). Operationally, strategic location and accessibility (Putra & Rudito, 2014) and dynamic events and programming (Kusumawati, 2020) are crucial for attracting visitors and enhancing their overall experience and willingness to revisit, as emphasized by Buliah et al. (2024). Ultimately, positive social interactions shape positive visitor perceptions and contribute to the overall visitors’ experience (Udjianto et al., 2021).

**2.2 Challenges and Opportunities in Traditional Markets**

Traditional markets have unique cultural value; they face severe competition from modern retail forms that provide better facilities and more efficient operations (Yaqin et al., 2023). This external pressure emphasizes the pressing need for traditional markets to improve internal operations and visitor experiences. The key problem is conditional or reactive engagement from traders. This approach is consistent with "reactive customer service," which is described as responding to client enquiries or issues only after they occur, highlighted by Radius Global Solutions (2023). Kim et al. (2020) also mentioned that even though many traders are naturally friendly, further contact typically requires visitors to start the conversation. This reactive position creates an unexpected burden on the visitor, who needs to make extra effort to obtain attention rather than being greeted with spontaneous warmth. As highlighted by customer service best practices, such a purely reactive approach often leads to a poor customer experience because it places the responsibility for engagement (Radius Global Solutions, 2023). This reduces the welcoming atmosphere, leading to perceived "rushed interactions" where conversations feel transactional and lacking genuine interest or eye contact. In the end, visitors might feel like an imposition rather than valued guests, and the market itself risks appearing disinterested in their overall experience.

Furthermore, there are constraints in deeper cultural interactions that present a substantial barrier. Overall tourist satisfaction is negatively influenced by limiting factors such as limited time, unfamiliarity, limited communication, and limited involvement according to Patwary (2020). Many visitors visit traditional markets not only to shop, but also to learn about the local culture and interact with the community. Even when basic English is available, opportunities for meaningful and engaging cultural exchanges can be limited. This linguistic barrier is a substantial barrier for travelers who seek meaningful social learning (Aliyah et al., 2020). When traders are unable to participate in fuller talks about the crafts, local traditions and so on, genuine relationships and a richer social exchange are lost, leaving tourists with a less authentic and less gratifying cultural experience.

The disparity in hospitality consistency among traders and stalls presents a challenge. Given the diverse of independence market traders, the application of hospitality standards is not always consistent. Some conversations may be quite polite and welcoming, while others may appear apathetic, rushed, or devoid of any evident engagement (Kim et al., 2020). This discrepancy makes unpredictable situation for visitors, who cannot predict the interaction. This reduces the visitor's perception of being constantly appreciated as a guest. Concerns about pricing consistency and fairness contribute to an unfavorable visitor experience. Issues such as sudden, unexplained price increases at food stalls or a general perception that tourists are charged higher prices than locals, even if not explicitly a hospitality issue, implicitly affect trust and a fundamental sense of fairness (Helmi & Pius, 2018). Such pricing disparities could generate negative word-of-mouth, discouraging future visits.

Finally, the physical environment itself frequently causes environmental and operational distress. Conditions such as pervasive crowding, especially during peak hours, can significantly restrict comfortable movement, invade personal space, and make browsing goods difficult. According to Hakim and Kristiyanto (2020), high noise levels further contribute to sensory overload, making communication challenging and the overall atmosphere feel "overwhelming" or "chaotic". These environmental issues cause discomfort to visitors, reducing it significantly from a perfectly comfortable shopping experience. Even if social interactions are favorable, these physical limitations can reduce a visitor's tendency to stay for longer, investigate, or return, reducing their overall enjoyment of the market. Despite the challenges, traditional markets offer distinctive features that provide a great opportunity to improve visitor experiences and maintain long-term viability. These markets include a variety of product offers, such as handicrafts, local artworks, and real cuisine, that differ from modern stores. Azahar and Jusoh (2019 also mentioned besides business, traditional markets frequently function as important leisure and social meeting places, which can be enhanced through strategic initiatives

Crucially, strategic management and revitalization activities are essential. This involves designing exciting events and programming that attract more tourists and increase expenditure, in line with modern tourism trends that prioritize experience services (Kusumawati, 2020). By prioritizing a framework of cultural sensitivity built on recognition, respect, and reciprocity, tourism in the market can shift from being solely about "trade and profit" to acknowledging cultural difference emphasize by Viken (2021). Directly resolving recognized challenges, such as strengthening communication skills among traders and others, can turn into opportunities for competitive advantage. Finally, optimizing social interchange by eliminating perceived negative consequences could increase Pasar Seni's appeal and assure its sustainability as an economic hub in Kuala Lumpur's tourism environment.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Design

A qualitative research design was used in the study, which was focused on Pasar Seni (Central Market). Additionally, nine visitors (N=9)—both domestic (local) and international—are chosen using a purposive sample technique. This non-probability targeting was justified to blend "insider" perspectives on cultural expectations with "outsider" observations on the cross-cultural application of ethical values, focusing on visitors who had spent at least one hour at the market within the last year.

The study exclusively employed semi-structured interviews to gather rich, context-specific insights into social interactions and ethical considerations that impact the visitor experience. The data collection was structured into two distinct modes:

i) Physical (Face-to-Face): A group discussion involving five participants (P2, P3, P4, P5, P6) was conducted primarily in Bahasa Melayu. This setting fostered a spontaneous and interactive environment, enabling the researcher to gather culturally-specific data on shared experiences and expectations from both local and international participants.

ii) Online (Virtual): The remaining four participants were interviewed online in English (P7, P8, P9) and one in Bahasa Melayu (P1). Within this virtual mode, two participants (P8 and P9) engaged in an online group discussion to leverage collective insights on common challenges.

The research adhered strictly to ethical guidelines for informed consent and confidentiality, with the pre-tested semi-structured interview guide adapted for virtual use due to access restrictions. Finally, the interview data were analyzed using Thematic Analysis, as adopted by Braun & Clarke (2006). The overarching themes and sub-themes were initially conceptualized with the assistance of a large language model (Gemini). Then, their application, coding, and interpretation are conducted independently by the researcher.

### 3.2 Participants Profile

This study investigated visitor challenges by interviewing five local visitors and four international visitors. This careful selection allowed for a comprehensive analysis from diverse perspectives. Local visitors helped us understand how cultural expectations shape perceived challenges in trader encounters, while international visitors provided insight into specific barriers they faced. This varied participant group ensured a complete picture of the difficulties affecting visitor’s experience with traders, capturing both insider and outsider views.

All selected participants met specific criteria (1) the visitors had visited Pasar Seni within the last year, and (2) the visitors had stayed for at least one hour during their visit.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Demographic Profile

This section presents the demographic profile of the study participants. Table 1 summarizes the key characteristics of the nine visitors (five local and four international) who participated in the semi-structured interviews.

Table 1. Profile and Demographics of Local Participants (N=5)

| Participants | Age | Gender | State/ Country Origin | Frequency of Visit to Pasar Seni | Occupation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| P1 | 23 | Female | Sabah | Occasionally | Student |
| P2 | 23 | Male | Gombak | Occasionally | Engineer |
| P3 | 24 | Female | Bangi | Occasionally | Financial Consultant |
| P4 | 24 | Male | Kedah | Rarely | Teacher |
| P5 | 23 | Female | Perlis | Rarely | Student |
| P6 | 25 | Male | Pakistan | First time | Engineer |
| P7 | 20 | Female | Myanmar | Occasionally | Student |
| P8 | 26 | Female | Brunei | Rarely | Accountant |
| P9 | 28 | Female | Indonesia | Rarely | Human Resources |

Table 2. Profile and Demographics of International Participants (N=4)

| Participants | Age | Gender | State/ Country Origin | Frequency of Visit to Pasar Seni | Occupation | Duration of Stay in Malaysia (International) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| P6 | 25 | Male | Pakistan | First time | Engineer | More than 10 years |
| P7 | 20 | Female | Myanmar | Occasionally | Student | 1 year |
| P8 | 26 | Female | Brunei | Rarely | Accountant | 5 years |
| P9 | 28 | Female | Indonesia | Rarely | Human Resources | 3 years |

### 4.2 The challenges encountered by visitors at Pasar Seni Kuala Lumpur

Based on the interview findings, this study manages to identify five themes related to the challenges encountered by visitors at Pasar Seni, Kuala Lumpur. The themes are as follows;

#### 4.2.1 Reactive Engagement

A significant finding was that the depth of engagement from traders is often conditional or reactive. While visitors generally perceive traders as welcoming, deeper interaction typically only occurs once a visitor actively initiates it or shows explicit interest, for example, by touching merchandise. As mentioned by P2, the traders warmly entertain and welcome the visitors.

Some other participants (P3 and P5) observed that traders might not attend to them if they are merely looking around, but engagement begins once items are handled. This suggests that while traders are responsive, the onus is often on the visitor to trigger more in-depth interactions.

Table 3. Findings on Reactive Engagement at Pasar Seni

| | VERBATIM |
|---|---|
| **P2** | "…if [they] see you at that time, it looks welcoming. But, once we ask, they will attend [to us]." |
| **P3** | "...for me, if we just look around, they don't attend [to us] … but once we start touching things, then they start to explain." |
| **P5** | "…when we show that we're interested, then they come." |

**4.2 Limitations in Deeper Cultural Conversations**

International visitors frequently reported that language proficiency was a significant challenge, often constraining opportunities for more enriching cultural exchanges. Several participants, including P2 and P3, indicated that their interactions with traders often remained at a professional or observational level, primarily focusing on product-related discussions rather than broader cultural conversation.

Table 4. Findings on Limitations in Deeper Cultural Conversations at Pasar Seni

| | VERBATIM |
|---|---|
| **P2** | "...for me, I don't chat much with them unless it's about the product. Just professional conversation" |

| | |
|---|---|
| **P3** | “Well, it's part of experiencing culture too, but I wasn't really in depth. Just observing.” |
| **P9** | “I think if like for me when I'm like communicating with the traders I just feel like motivated to like communicate in Bahasa Melayu more like the cultures itself...” |

**4.3 Variability in Hospitality Consistency**

Despite the majority of interactions being positive, the diverse nature of independent traders at Pasar Seni inherently leads to some variability in the consistent application of hospitality principles. Some visitors noted that traders' willingness to engage could be "50-50" if a visitor was merely browsing without a clear intent to purchase. It means that a visitor who is merely browsing (looking without showing a clear, immediate intent to buy) has only a **fifty percent chance** of receiving friendly, proactive attention or service from a trader. This finding illustrates a **critical lack of standardized welcoming behavior** within the market. Instead of proactively greeting or assisting every visitor as a potential guest, the traders' willingness to interact is **conditional**.

Table 5. Findings on Variability in Hospitality Consistency at Pasar Seni

| | **VERBATIM** |
|---|---|
| **P3** | "...if we're looking, they attend 50-50, whether they want to attend or not." |

**4.4 Pricing Consistency and Fairness Concerns**

There is evident in experiences with sudden price increases at food stalls, implicitly affecting trust and a sense of fairness. For the local visitors, the perceived higher price can lead to feelings of being undervalued or unfairly treated, and inconsistent pricing can add the cost of uncertainty and potential exploitation. For instance, P3, with a background in handmade crafts, found prices for items like crochet to be "not fair" for local Malaysians, even if those prices seemed reasonable for tourists with stronger currencies.

Table 6. Findings on Pricing Consistency and Fairness Concerns at Pasar Seni

| | VERBATIM |
|---|---|
| **P3** | "…with a background in handmade crafts, items like crochet, considering it "not fair" for local Malaysians, even if reasonable for tourists with stronger currencies." |

**4.5 Environmental and Operational Discomforts**

Many visitors found Pasar Seni Kuala Lumpur generally comfortable and easy to navigate, but the market's crowded nature was a consistent point of feedback, often leading to environmental and operational discomfort. Some participants described the space as feeling "narrow" or potentially "overwhelming" due to the constant presence of people, vehicles, and active stall promotions. Consequently, the noise level was perceived as high, attributed both to the sheer volume of visitors and the presence of street performers, which could be a source of frustration for some. For example, P1 noted that while the noise level affected the overall experience, it was primarily due to the crowd rather than trader activity. P9 articulated that the environment could be "a little bit too much" for sensitive individuals, citing the concentration of vehicles, people, and promotional activities. Despite this, P9 also mentioned a degree of preparedness for the noise upon arrival.

Table 7. Findings on Environmental and Operational Discomforts at Pasar Seni

| | VERBATIM |
|---|---|
| **P1** | “The noise level does affect the experience a bit, but usually it's because there are so many people, not because the traders are noisy.” |
| **P9** | “I couldn't, I feel like if you are very, how do you say it, very sensitive person that is kind of like easily overwhelmed, it's kind of like a little bit too much for you to go there. Because there are a lot of vehicles, people, cars, stalls, you know. Yeah, and the stalls promoting their products.<br><br>“…when I go out from LRT or MRT, I was like very prepared with the noises.” |

## 5. DISCUSSION

The trader interaction in Pasar Seni is predominantly conditional or reactive, which the visitor has to initiate in order to interact (P3, P5). This approach puts the responsibility of hospitality firmly on the guest, even though traders are perceived as nice once they are approached. This conduct would be in line with Radius Global Solutions (2023) definition of "reactive customer service", which states that a response should only be given in reaction to a client's request or obvious show of interest. This undermines the market's competitive power—its basis in a human-centered ideology and has the direct effect of creating the perceived shortage of engaged hospitality referred to in the problem statement (Kim et al., 2020; Tumanggor et al., 2023). Theoretically, this reactive behavior disqualifies the perceived reward of the social exchange, because tourists must spend unplanned effort in order to be attended to.

While traders generally employed clear and considerate language for basic communication and readily used English for transactional purposes, the depth of these interactions frequently remained at a functional level. This practical restriction may unintentionally prevent the full expression of hospitality, especially for international visitors seeking genuinely immersive experiences beyond mere commercial exchanges. However, some visitors, like P9, expressed a motivation to bridge this gap by attempting to communicate more in Bahasa Melayu, signaling a desire for a deeper cultural connection. According to Aliyah et al. (2020), language constraints greatly restrict genuine social interaction in conventional marketplaces. It prevents the communication of sincere reciprocity and recognition (Viken, A., 2021) which are necessary to be able to turn a business visit into a truly meaningful cultural experience.

Inconsistency of independent traders results in an unstable Consistency Variability in Hospitality, described by one of the respondents as a "50-50" chance of interacting while merely browsing (P3). its means, that hospitality and willingness of a Pasar Seni trader to interact with a potential visitor is very unstable and unreliable. Inconsistency creates an unstable setting for the visitors, making them avoid feeling always valued as guests. This finding validates Kim et al. (2020) observations on the wide variation in the application of service among independent market traders. The variation has a direct bearing on the research problem's observation of "less hospitality and a less welcoming environment," illustrating how the lack of a standardized service takes away from the overall positive image of the market.

Pricing Consistency and Fairness Issues—like surprise price increases and differential pricing found to favor locals—implicitly affect visitor’s trust and perceptions of being treated fairly. This problem is particularly relevant to local visitors, who may perceive themselves as being undervalued (P3). As Helmi and Pius (2018) discovered, such pricing inconsistency, even if not necessarily a hospitality issue, erodes visitor trust and calls forth negative affective responses and word-of-mouth. This ambiguity directly takes away from the consumers' visitor experience, and thus open pricing becomes crucial to instill and maintain the long-term trust required for sustainability in markets.

Finally, respondents consistently referring to over-crowding, undue noise (from masses and street performers), and the atmosphere feeling "overwhelming" or "chaotic" (P9). These empirical observations agree with concerns identified by Hakim and Kristiyanto (2020) elsewhere in other traditional marketplace settings. Although infrastructural and managerial issues rather than ethical trading issues, they are critical because these physical barriers restrict easy mobility and discovery, in turn reducing a visitor's propensity to stay, engage, or return. These physical matters therefore place a stringent cap on the maximum effectiveness of beneficial social contact in creating sustained visitation and repeat business.

The challenges identified in Pasar Seni Kuala Lumpur offer crucial insights for its enhancement, leading to several vital recommendations for immediate action and areas for future academic inquiry. Theoretically, these findings underscore how specific hindrances, such as predominantly transactional communication and inconsistent service, directly diminish the perceived rewards within the Social Exchange Theory framework. This highlights a critical insight: functional communication alone is often insufficient for achieving deep cultural immersion, especially in multicultural market settings like Pasar Seni.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The qualitative nature of the study, based on interviews with a specific group of participants, means the findings reflect in-depth perceptions but may not be broadly generalizable to all visitor demographics or other traditional markets. The focus on a single location, Pasar Seni, also limits wider applicability without further comparative research. Additionally, while the study aimed to incorporate the direct opinions of traders through interviews, permission was not obtained, resulting in the reliance solely on visitor perspectives during the data collection phase.

Despite these limitations, the identified challenges provide actionable insights for enhancing the visitor experience. For Central Market Sdn Bhd (Management), key recommendations include developing comprehensive, structured hospitality and customer service training programs for all traders to ensure proactive engagement and consistent service quality across the market. This should be coupled with efforts to implement clearer pricing transparency and consistency policies to build visitor trust. Investments in environmental improvements are also crucial, focusing on effective crowd management, noise reduction strategies, and enhancing general amenities like seating and ventilation to address physical discomfort. Crucially, active collaboration with traders, including incorporating their opinions and feedback through regular dialogues or surveys, is vital for the successful implementation and adoption of these initiatives. Traders themselves are encouraged to embrace a more proactive and culturally engaging approach, initiating greetings, offering assistance, and sharing more nuanced stories about their products and local culture.

Building on the current study, future research should first specifically investigate traders' opinions on the identified challenges, including their perceived barriers to proactive engagement and deep cultural dialogue, as well as their views on proposed training or policy changes, which would crucially complement the current visitor-centric findings. Additionally, expanding the scope through comparative studies would be beneficial, allowing for the comparison of visitor experiences and challenges across different traditional markets within Malaysia or other multicultural contexts, to identify both commonalities and unique aspects.

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ARTICLE

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# Child Safety in Malaysian Water Theme Parks: Perspectives from Family Tourism

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## ABSTRACT

As family travel gains popularity, it is a top priority for parents to have a safe and enjoyable travel experience for their children. In Malaysia, destinations with water facilities are highly sought after due to the nation's tropical climate. Yet, most family destination attractions, especially theme parks, are struggling to upkeep good standards of safety. Although there has been greater emphasis on safety, there are still difficulties in ensuring theme parks translate measures into being child-friendly. One of the significant challenges lies in identifying suitable respondents in the form of parents who visit water theme parks with their children. Additionally, there is limited research on the consistency of safety measures at different locations, making it a critical requirement to analyze best practices and find areas that need improvement. The objective of this research is to evaluate the level of child safety practices at kids zones currently implemented in water theme parks. The quantitative research approach is employed through online surveys on parents and guardians who have taken children to water theme parks. Family travel networks partnership guarantees a relevant and varied sample. The research assesses the enforcement of safety protocols designed for children and examines how they can be developed to provide a better overall travel experience. The findings have theoretical and practical implications. The study provides insights for tourism stakeholders, evidence-based suggestions for policymakers, and helps parents make informed decisions on safe, children- friendly travel experiences. Future research could consider longitudinal studies.

Keywords: Child safety; Family tourism; Safety measures; Tourism policy; Water theme parks

Article Classification: Research Paper

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Malaysia’s water theme parks have experienced significant growth in popularity, with visitor numbers rising steadily over the past decade, contributing to Malaysia’s emergence as a key theme park destination in Southeast Asia (The Edge Malaysia, 2023). In Malaysia, water theme parks are especially popular among children, particularly during school holidays and group outings like school trips (Ting & Tan, 2017; The Edge Malaysia, 2023). Parks such as Legoland Malaysia, Sunway Lagoon, and A’Famosa attract families with their interactive water attractions. These visits often include parents, guardians, or teachers, which raises concerns about whether one guardian can effectively supervise multiple children at once. As a result, child safety is a top priority. This highlights the need for clear safety measures and child-friendly facilities (Wong & Cheung, 2019; Sadeghloo et al., 2024). Family tourism has become a growing global segment. It offers unique leisure, educational, and bonding experiences for parents and children at destinations like Disneyland in the United States, Legoland in Europe, and Universal Studios in Asia. These places are designed to accommodate both adults and children, providing suitable facilities, lodging, and activities (Wong & Cheung, 2019; Albayrak et al., 2021;)

However, inconsistent safety measures, such as unbalanced monitoring and unclear policies, have raised concerns among parents. This directly affects their satisfaction and confidence in these destinations (Lee & Thompson, 2007; Wong & Cheung, 2019). The travel industry, especially family-based tourism, has grown significantly over the years. The safety of children has become a major concern for parents when picking travel destinations (Kim & Ko, 2012). For many parents, ensuring their children's safety is a key factor in selecting recreational spots. Beyond fun and relaxation, family outings need to provide peace of mind, especially in high-risk environments like water parks. Parents worry not only about physical safety, such as drowning or injury, but also about emotional well-being in crowded or unfamiliar places (Bigné et al., 2005; Sadeghloo et al., 2024). A destination with clear safety procedures, visible staff, and designs focused on children helps parents feel more confident in managing their kids, especially during group visits or when supervising multiple children alone.

In Malaysian water theme parks, families prefer these venues because of the tropical climate. However, inconsistent child safety practices have become a key issue. Parents see different levels of safety enforcement, especially in children's areas. This inconsistency leads to dissatisfaction and decreases trust in these locations (Wong & Cheung, 2019). Although many parks offer safety features, the lack of uniformity among them creates confusion and potential risks.

Safety in theme parks goes beyond just preventing physical injuries. Parents are also concerned about their children's emotional and psychological well-being, especially in crowded and unfamiliar places. Unfortunately, current safety practices often do not address these softer aspects, which highlights a gap in comprehensive child-centered protection (Bigné et al., 2005). Moreover, there is limited research on whether safety measures are applied consistently across Malaysian water parks. This makes it harder to improve safety standards. Without clear guidelines or best practices, operators and policymakers struggle to ensure the quality and effectiveness of the current safety systems (Wu et al., 2018). Therefore, evaluating current child safety practices, particularly in children's areas, is both timely and necessary. This evaluation can help identify weaknesses and support improvements that boost parental trust and enhance children's overall safety.

The objective of this study is to evaluate the level of child safety practices currently implemented in kids' zones at water theme parks in Malaysia. This research aims to look at how well these safety measures address the needs of young visitors. It will also evaluate their effectiveness in providing a safe environment and explore how they affect parental trust and satisfaction. The findings should reveal current strengths and point out areas that need improvement. This will help create safer and more child-friendly recreational spaces in Malaysia's tourism industry.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent studies show that more attention is being paid to child safety in water theme parks. This focus is part of the bigger picture of family tourism. The research helps us understand important factors like safety measures, family-friendly facilities, and risk management in water attractions (Bertolucci, 2022; Sadeghloo et al., 2024). As water theme parks become more popular, especially in tropical areas like Malaysia, addressing safety concerns for children is increasingly important. In Malaysia, well-known places like Legoland Malaysia, Sunway Lagoon, and Genting Highlands have seen a steady rise in family visitors. This growth is due to investments in attractions that cater to families (Abdul- Rahim et al., 2017; Ting & Tan, 2017). Parents now look for more than just fun. They want places that focus on child safety by providing kids' zones, visible staff, emergency plans, and well-thought-out park layouts.

### 2.1 Family Tourism Theory

Family Tourism Theory offers a way to understand how families pick travel spots that meet their enjoyment and children's developmental needs. Developed in the early 2000s, the theory emphasizes the need for inclusive spaces that promote bonding, learning, and psychological well-being for every family member (Tseng et al., 2024). Applying this theory, scholars argue that safety measures tailored to children are central to a family's travel decision-making process. Research shows that parental trust is strongly influenced by how visible and consistent safety features are ranging from child-tracking systems and clearly designated areas to staff trained in child-friendly communication (Sadeghloo et al., 2024; Wong & Cheung, 2019). In water theme parks, where physical risks such as drowning or injury are higher, the alignment of safety infrastructure with child-centered values from Family Tourism Theory becomes especially relevant. Moreover, Child Safe Tourism Principles complement this framework by promoting safety standards that go beyond physical hazards to include emotional reassurance. For instance, mascots, colorful signage, and soft play environments are not just decorative they provide psychological safety, reduce fear, and enhance the overall experience for both children and parents (Bertolucci, 2022).

**2.2 Dimensions of Family Tourism Theory**

Family Tourism Theory provides insight into how families choose travel destinations and evaluate their experiences. The theory shows that travel decisions are impacted by leisure, as well as the need for safety, bonding, and growth opportunities for children (Tseng et al., 2024). These factors are particularly significant in locations like water theme parks, where enjoyment and child safety are key considerations. Family Tourism Theory emphasizes that family travel choices are influenced by leisure opportunities as well as factors that ensure children's safety, well-being, and development. Within this framework, several dimensions are important for assessing child safety in water theme parks. The first dimension is Bonding and Togetherness. This highlights how family tourism fosters shared experiences that strengthen family connections. Activities like water play and interactive rides allow meaningful interaction between parents and children, which reinforces family unity (Tseng et al., 2024).

The second dimension is Learning and Development. Travel serves as a platform for children's cognitive and physical growth beyond just leisure. In water theme parks, initiatives such as safety education programs, informative signage, and supervised learning activities reflect this dimension (Bertolucci, 2022).

The third dimension is Physical Safety, a key factor in choosing a destination. Families prioritize visible and proactive safety measures. This includes trained lifeguards, clearly displayed safety rules, and well-maintained infrastructure, all of which help reduce the risk of accidents and injuries (Lee & Thompson, 2007).

Emotional and Psychological Security is also important. Both parents and children look for environments that decrease anxiety and promote comfort in new settings. Child- friendly designs, approachable staff, and fun mascots contribute to psychological reassurance and improve the overall visitor experience (Wong & Cheung, 2019).

Finally, Parental Trust and Risk Perception play a significant role in family travel decisions. Parents' confidence in a destination is strengthened by reliable safety inspections, clear communication of emergency procedures, and child-tracking systems. These factors build trust and decrease perceived risks, making families more inclined to choose a destination (Sadeghloo et al., 2024).

Together, these dimensions provide a solid framework for evaluating child safety in family tourism. They also form the basis for the measurement variables used in this study. Table 1 presents a summary of these dimensions and illustrates their application in the context of water theme parks.

Table 1. Family Tourism Theory Dimensions and Their Application to Child Safety

| Dimension | Definition | Application in Water Theme Parks |
|---|---|---|
| Bonding and Togetherness | Shared experiences that strengthen family ties | Family play zones, group rides, water activities |
| Learning and Development | Opportunities for growth and education | Safety education programs, informative signage |
| Physical Safety | Protection from injury and accidents | Lifeguards, safety barriers, and regular safety inspections |
| Emotional Security | Psychological comfort and reassurance | Child-friendly design, mascots, and approachable staff |
| Parental Trust & Risk Perception | Parents' confidence in safety measures | Child-tracking systems, emergency response protocols |

**2.3 Best Practices at Water Theme Parks**

Water theme parks offer a variety of attractions such as water slides, splash pools, and artificial rivers that appeal to children. However, the dynamic nature of these environments also introduces a number of risks, including slipping, collisions, submersion, and separation from guardians. Therefore, best practices in child safety are critical in minimizing hazards and improving the visitor experience. Among the most important safety provisions are height and weight restrictions, physical barriers, water depth markers, and adequate signage in multiple languages. Effective water theme parks also segment play zones based on age and ability, which allows for tailored safety supervision and risk mitigation. Lifeguard presence is another crucial component ideally, guards should be highly visible, well-distributed across attractions, and trained in both CPR and child- specific emergency protocols (Lee & Thompson, 2007). Several parks have started implementing digital tracking systems, wristbands with identification features, and mobile app integrations to help parents monitor their children in real time. These practices reflect a broader industry shift toward proactive, tech-driven safety management. Studies by Truong et al. (2022) and Scheller et al. (2024) further highlight how Southeast Asian parks are adopting international safety benchmarks, while also noting persistent gaps in standardization. This underlines the need for continuous assessment and improvement, particularly in kids' zones where child behavior is less predictable and the margin for error is minimal.

### 2.4 Gaps in Existing Research

While literature on family tourism and child safety in theme parks has expanded in recent years, several critical gaps remain unaddressed. First, most existing studies focus broadly on overall safety or visitor satisfaction, with minimal attention given to child-specific safety practices within dedicated kids' zones (Wong & Cheung, 2019; Wu et al., 2018). These areas are often treated as part of the general park environment, despite being uniquely designed for and frequently used by young children who require heightened supervision and protection.

Second, emotional and psychological safety such as children's sense of security in unfamiliar environments is rarely included in safety assessments. Previous studies have largely emphasized physical hazards like drowning or injury (Lee & Thompson, 2007), without exploring how environmental design, staff interaction, and emergency preparedness affect a child's comfort and confidence (Bertolucci, 2022; Bigné et al., 2005).

Third, standardized evaluations across different parks are limited. Few comparative studies have assessed whether safety protocols and infrastructure are implemented consistently across Malaysian water theme parks. This makes it difficult for parents, operators, and policymakers to identify best practices or benchmark safety standards (Wu et al., 2018).

Finally, there is a lack of research based on direct parental input. Parents and guardians are the primary decision-makers in family travel and the most involved in supervising children during park visits. However, their perceptions are often underrepresented in academic literature on safety. This study addresses this gap by evaluating child safety practices from a parental perspective, specifically focusing on kids' zones, an area that remains underexplored despite its relevance in family tourism.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research design

The research aims to assess child-friendly safety features in family tourism destinations at Malaysian water theme parks. To achieve this objective, a quantitative research design is applied, allowing for statistical analysis of child safety practices. The study adopts a descriptive approach to explore current safety measures and identify potential shortcomings. An online survey serves as the primary data collection tool, which is particularly suitable for gathering parents' perspectives on safety and for pinpointing areas in need of improvement.

### 3.2 Population

The study population consists of parents or guardians who have visited Malaysian water theme parks with children under the age of 12. This group is selected because they are directly responsible for evaluating and ensuring child safety during family trips. The choice of this population is further supported by visitor statistics from key Malaysian water theme parks. For example, Sunway Lagoon recorded approximately 1.5 million visitors in 2023, with families accounting for an estimated 60% of total attendance (Sunway Group, 2024). Similarly, A'Famosa Water Theme Park attracted around 500,000 visitors annually, with 40% participation from family groups, amounting to approximately 200,000 family visitors (Malaysia Attractions Benchmark Report, 2024). Globally, it is estimated that 30–40% of theme park visitors are parents accompanied by children aged 12 and younger (IAAPA, 2024), further supporting the relevance of focusing on this demographic.

### 3.3 Sampling

A purposive sampling method is used to select participants who meet specific criteria: they must have visited at least one water theme park in Malaysia within the past year and must have brought children aged 12 or younger during the visit. This approach ensures that participants have recent, relevant experiences that align with the study's focus on child safety. According to Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size table, a population of 60,000 to 80,000 would typically require a sample of approximately 382 respondents to ensure a 95% confidence level and ±5% margin of error. However, this study uses 300 respondents based on a purposive sampling approach, which remains acceptable for exploratory research, especially when targeting specific demographics with relevant experience.

Table 2 shows the Krejcie and Morgan's sample table size.

Table 2. Krejcie and Morgan's sample table size.

| Population Size (N) | 10 | 50 | 100 | 200 | 500 | 1000 | 5000 | 10000 | 50000 | 100000+ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SampleSize (S) | 10 | 44 | 80 | 132 | 217 | 278 | 357 | 370 | 381 | 384 |

### 3.4 Research Instruments

The study used a structured questionnaire based on reliable research tools in tourism safety and family tourism. The questionnaire had four sections: demographic information, evaluation of safety measures, respondents' awareness of safety programs, and an open-ended section for additional comments. We selected items that measure child safety practices from established studies to ensure their validity. For instance, we adapted safety signage and inspection items from Lee and Thompson (2007), lifeguard sufficiency and educational safety programs from Hamilton, Keech, and Peden (2025), child-tracking systems from Wong and Cheung (2019), staff training in child safety from Sadeghloo et al. (2024), and first aid and safety equipment items from Wu et al. (2018). Table 3 summarizes the variables and their sources.

Table 3. Variables and Sources of Measurement Items

| Variable / Item | Example Item Wording | Source (Adopted/Adapted) |
|---|---|---|
| Safety signage | "The park has clear signs indicating child safety rules." | Lee & Thompson (2007) |
| Lifeguard sufficiency | "There are sufficient lifeguards on duty at all times." | Hamilton, Keech, & Peden (2025) |
| Child-tracking system | "The park has a system for tracking children in case they get lost." | Wong & Cheung (2019) |
| First aid facilities | "The water theme park has a first aid station easily accessible." | Wu et al. (2018) |
| Staff training in child safety | "Staff at the park are trained in child safety procedures." | Sadeghloo et al. (2024) |
| Regular safety inspections | "The water theme park conducts regular safety inspections." | Lee & Thompson (2007); |
| Emergency response communication | "Emergency response plans are clearly communicated to visitors." | Bertolucci (2022) |
| Child safety equipment | "The park provides safety equipment suitable for children." | Wu et al. (2018); Kim & Ko (2012) |
| Educational safety programs | "Awareness of educational programs on water safety for children." | Bertolucci (2022); Hamilton et al. (2025) |

All items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 for Strongly Disagree to 5 for Strongly Agree. We collected data over four weeks using Google Forms, which offered a convenient and low-cost platform that was widely accessible. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling on social media and personal networks. We strictly followed ethical protocols, including informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality. A pilot test with five respondents helped refine item clarity and wording, leading to minor adjustments while keeping the construct validity intact.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

Data gathered from the survey is analyzed using IBM SPSS software Statistics 27. The study applies descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, to examine child safety measures and to highlight gaps and weaknesses in current practices. The use of descriptive analysis aligns with the research objectives and provides a systematic and reliable framework for interpreting the collected data, particularly in studies focused on visitor experience and satisfaction (Wu et al., 2018).

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Reliability Analysis

In order to assess the internal consistency of the measurement instrument, reliability analysis was performed using Cronbach's Alpha. The analysis resulted in a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.976, which exceeds the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70 set by Nunnally (1978). This shows that the tool is very reliable. The corrected item-total correlations for all items were above 0.80, indicating strong relationships between each item and the overall scale. Table 5 summarizes the reliability results.

Table 5. Reliability analysis results

| Construct | No. of Items | Cronbach's Alpha | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Child Safety Practices Scale | 10 | 0.976 | Excellent Reliability |

The high reliability value shows that the scale is consistent and works well for measuring how children feel about safety. So, the tool is statistically reliable for analyzing the descriptive results.

### 4.2 Demographic Profile

The findings from the quantitative analysis of 309 parent respondents provide valuable insights into perceptions of child safety measures at Malaysian water theme parks. The study addresses three research objectives: evaluating current safety practices, identifying shortcomings, and proposing recommendations, with descriptive statistics used to interpret survey responses and highlighting key patterns. Most respondents are aged between 26 and

35, indicating that young adults are the primary visitors, typically parents or legal guardians who frequently visit popular parks such as Sunway Lagoon, SplashMania Waterpark, and A'Famosa Water Theme Park about three to four times per year. The majority also reside in suburban areas, suggesting a predominantly local viewpoint influenced by suburban travel habits. Table 6 illustrates the demographic profile.

Table 6. Demographic profile

| Variable | Category | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Age | Under 25 | 52 | 17.5 |
| | 26 – 35 | 81 | 26.9 |
| | 36 – 45 | 69 | 23 |
| | 46 – 55 | 53 | 17.8 |
| | 55+ | 45 | 14.9 |
| Visit Annually | 1 – 2 times | 80 | 26.5 |
| | 3 -4 times | 146 | 48.5 |
| | 5+ | 75 | 24.9 |
| Role in Travel Group | Parent/ Legal Guardian | 229 | 76.4 |
| | Other Caregiver | 32 | 10.7 |
| | School Trip Teacher | 39 | 12.9 |
| | Sunway Lagoon | | |
| | 0 times | 26 | 8.7% |
| | 1-2 times | 71 | 23.7% |
| | 3-4 times | 57 | |
| | | | 19.0% |
| Frequency visiting following water them | 5-6 times | 61 | 20.3% |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| park annually | 7-9 times | 65 | 21.7% |
| | 10+ | 29 | 9.7% |
| | SplashMania Waterpark | | |
| | 0 times | 23 | 7.7% |
| | 1-2 times | 53 | 17.7% |
| | 3-4 times | 75 | 25.0% |
| | 5-6 times | 63 | 21.0% |
| | 7-9 times | 68 | 22.7% |
| | 10+ | 27 | 9.0% |
| | A'Famosa Water Theme Park | | |
| | 0 times | 40 | 13.3% |
| | 1-2 times | 65 | 21.7% |
| | 3-4 times | 73 | 24.3% |

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|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 5-6 times | 57 | 19.0% |
| | 7-9 times | 47 | 15.7% |
| | 10+ | 27 | 9.0% |
| | Adventure Waterpark Desaru Coast | | |
| | 0 times | 38 | 12.7% |
| | 1-2 times | 69 | 23.0% |
| | 3-4 times | 42 | 14.0% |
| | 5-6 times | 52 | 17.3% |
| | 7-9 times | 70 | 23.3% |
| | 10+ | 38 | 12.7% |
| | LEGOLAND Water Park | | |
| | 0 times | 35 | 11.7% |
| | 1-2 times | 67 | 22.3% |
| | 3-4 times | 68 | 22.7% |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 5-6 times | 54 | 18.0% |
| | 7-9 times | 59 | 19.7% |
| | 10+ | 26 | 8.7% |
| | Lost Word of Tambun | | |
| | 0 times | 28 | 9.3% |
| | 1-2 times | 60 | 20.0% |
| | 3-4 times | 70 | 23.3% |
| | 5-6 times | 53 | 17.7% |
| | 7-9 times | 61 | 20.3% |
| | 10+ | 37 | 12.3% |
| | Splash Out Langkawi | | |
| | 0 times | 33 | 11.0% |
| | 1-2 times | 53 | 17.7% |
| | 3-4 times | 70 | 23.3% |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 5-6 times | 57 | 19.0% |
| | 7-9 times | 66 | 22.0% |
| | 10+ | 30 | 10.0% |
| | Wet World Water Park | | |
| | 0 times | 28 | 9.3% |
| | 1-2 times | 61 | 20.3% |
| | 3-4 times | 63 | 21.0% |
| | 5-6 times | 65 | 21.7% |
| | 7-9 times | 66 | 22.0% |
| | 10+ | 26 | 8.7% |
| | Bukit Gambang Waterpark | | |
| | 0 times | 27 | 9.0% |
| | 1-2 times | 67 | 22.3% |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 3-4 times | 66 | 22.0% |
| | 5-6 times | 53 | 17.7% |
| | | | |
| | 7-9 times | 64 | 21.3% |
| | 10+ | 32 | 10.7% |
| | i-city Waterworld | | |
| | 0 times | 21 | 7.0% |
| | 1-2 times | 60 | 20.0% |
| | 3-4 times | 62 | 20.7% |
| | 5-6 times | 84 | 28.0% |
| | 7-9 times | 56 | 18.7% |
| | 10+ | 26 | 8.7% |
| | Others | | |
| | 0 times | 28 | 9.3% |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 1-2 times | 66 | 22.0% |
| | 3-4 times | 68 | 22.7% |
| | 5-6 times | 73 | 24.3% |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 7-9 times | 53 | 17.7% |
| | 10+ | 21 | 7.0% |
| Primary Reside | Urban Area | 58 | 19.4 |
| | Suburban Area | 107 | 35.6 |
| | Rural Area | 97 | 32.4 |
| | Outside the country | 38 | 12.6 |

**4.3 Analysis of Optimum Water Theme Park Safety Practices**

The descriptive analysis indicates that most parents and guardians generally agree on the adequacy of child safety practices at Malaysian water theme parks. About 77% of respondents, including those who "Slightly Agree," "Agree," and "Strongly Agree," expressed satisfaction with the current safety measures. This suggests that, overall, visitors hold a positive perception of the parks’ safety efforts, though some areas may still need further attention and improvement.

Findings related to the research objective indicate that respondents generally perceive current child safety practices in Malaysian water theme parks as effective. The overall mean score recorded across all 10 items assessing safety practices was 4.45 out of 6 on a Likert scale, suggesting that most respondents fell within the range of “Slightly Agree” to “Agree.” As shown in Table 7, the highest-rated items were regular safety inspections, child-tracking systems, and the presence of sufficient lifeguards, each with mean scores ranging from 4.50 to 4.59. These items reflect strong visitor confidence in the parks' visible and proactive safety efforts. The higher ratings indicate that parents and guardians appreciate consistent maintenance, effective monitoring technologies, and reliable on-site personnel key components that contribute to their sense of security during visits.

However, the lowest-rated item staff training in child safety procedures while still positively received, reflects a potential area for improvement. This aspect recorded a lower mean score of 4.35, suggesting that although respondents acknowledge some level of competency, they perceive room for enhancement in how staff respond to child-specific emergencies or interact with young visitors. The standard deviation for this item (e.g., ±0.78, if available from SPSS) may also indicate variability in perceptions, possibly influenced by differing experiences across park locations. Overall, while the results show a generally positive outlook on safety practices, the relatively lower rating for staff preparedness highlights the importance of ongoing professional development and visible emergency readiness in ensuring parental trust and child safety.

Table 7. The questionnaire items

| Item No. | Item Description | Mean | SD | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| B5 | The water theme park conducts regular safety inspections. | 4.59 | 1.521 | 1 |
| B9 | The park has a system for tracking children in case they get lost. | 4.56 | 1.540 | 2 |
| B6 | There are sufficient lifeguards on duty at all times. | 4.50 | 1.447 | 3 |
| B3 | The park provides safety equipment suitable for children. | 4.49 | 1.660 | 4 |
| B10 | The water theme park has a first aid station easily accessible to visitors. | 4.49 | 1.492 | 5 |
| B4 | The park has designated areas for children to play safely. | 4.39 | 1.569 | 6 |
| B8 | Emergency response plans are clearly communicated to visitors. | 4.38 | 1.626 | 7 |
| B7 | Awareness of educational programs on water safety for children. | 4.37 | 1.437 | 8 |
| B1 | The park has clear signs indicating child safety rules. | 4.36 | 1.511 | 9 |
| B2 | Staff at the water theme park are trained in child safety procedures. | 4.35 | 1.575 | 10 |

Further analysis revealed that parents with children under five years old demonstrated higher levels of concern compared to parents of older children, particularly regarding the sufficiency of safety barriers and proximity of first aid stations. This indicates that child age influences the perception of safety adequacy. Additionally, parents who visited multiple water theme parks within a year exhibited a more critical evaluation, suggesting that comparative experiences lead to higher safety expectations. A notable proportion of respondents (around 23%) indicated that safety-related information provided on park websites and signage was insufficient, which points to an area that could greatly benefit from improvement in communication and transparency.

Another critical finding is that while child-tracking systems were rated positively, there is a strong parental desire for more advanced technological integrations, such as mobile app notifications and real-time tracking updates. This suggests that future investments in digital safety solutions could significantly enhance parental satisfaction and trust.

## 5. DISCUSSION

Among the safety practices evaluated, the top three with the highest mean scores were regular safety inspections (M = 4.59), child-tracking systems (M = 4.56), and the sufficiency of lifeguards (M = 4.50). These findings highlight the strengths of Malaysian water theme parks, showing an emphasis on operational safety and technological readiness. The consistently high ratings indicate that Malaysian parents and guardians appreciate these safety measures, which help create a safe and family-friendly atmosphere. Regular inspections show a park's commitment to maintenance and hazard prevention. Child-tracking systems offer modern support for parents in busy environments. Having trained lifeguards on duty ensures quick responses, especially in high-risk water areas.

These elements show a strong connection to the principles of Family Tourism Theory. This theory highlights the need for recreational spaces that provide physical safety, emotional security, and easy supervision for families with young children. Additionally, these safety features align with Child Safe Tourism Principles, which encourage organized and child-friendly protection strategies. In Malaysia, where water theme parks are a key part of family tourism, these practices help build public trust. They also enhance the reputation of local parks like Sunway Lagoon and Legoland Malaysia as dependable places for leisure. The high rating for regular safety inspections specifically supports visible safety protocols and contributes significantly to visitor assurance in public recreational settings.

The second highest rated practice, the use of child-tracking systems, supports Lee et al. (2007)'s findings that technology-driven safety measures significantly enhance parental peace of mind in crowded environments. Malaysian parents increasingly expect rapid responses to potential child separation incidents, making such interventions a new norm in family tourism. Similarly, the positive perception of lifeguard sufficiency aligns with global recommendations, which emphasize that well-trained, visible, and strategically positioned lifeguards serve as the most reliable frontline safety personnel Bertolucci, S. F. (2022), which emphasize that well-trained, visible, and strategically positioned lifeguards serve as the most reliable frontline safety personnel. In Malaysia, the presence of attentive lifeguards is crucial for reinforcing parental confidence and reducing perceived risks during recreational outings.

On the other hand, the lowest-rated item staff training in child safety procedures (M = 4.35) raises concerns regarding staff preparedness in addressing child-specific emergencies. While equipment and safety features may be present, the perceived gap in staff visibility or engagement indicates the need for improved competency and proactive interaction. This finding echoes the assertion that visitor confidence improves when staff readiness is demonstrated not only through qualifications but also through visible drills and responsive behavior. In the Malaysian water theme park context, prioritizing staff development could offer both physical protection and emotional reassurance to visitors, especially when dealing with large groups of children.

Comparisons with previous studies show how important safety signs, trained staff, and parental involvement are. They also reveal a growing public demand for better monitoring technology and organized safety education programs. These findings indicate a shift toward modern, proactive safety management in Malaysia. While current practices are mostly well-received, ongoing improvement is crucial. Investing in staff training, child-tracking systems, and safety education will be vital for meeting changing expectations and raising safety standards in Malaysia's water theme park industry.

Moreover, integrating sustainability into water theme park operations is essential for ensuring the long-term safety and success of family tourism. Sustainable planning and management which include regular safety upgrades, better waste handling, and eco- friendly infrastructure—improve not only safety but also environmental responsibility. Involving parents, staff, and local communities in safety-focused initiatives helps develop child-centered tourism solutions. Adopting green practices across accommodations and operations boosts visitor satisfaction and supports wider goals of sustainable tourism. Using technology, like mobile-enabled child-tracking systems and smart monitoring tools, should be expanded to provide real-time protection. Eco-certifications such as Green Globe can also help water theme parks build trust with families who care about safety and sustainability.

The role of stakeholders is crucial in promoting safety and sustainability in Malaysia’s water theme parks. Park managers must ensure strict safety protocols are followed and provide ongoing training for staff, especially in handling emergencies involving children. Policymakers are key in drafting and enforcing updated safety regulations, while parents offer valuable feedback. Industry associations provide certification frameworks and best practices, and community members can join in educational safety campaigns. Together, these groups can create safer, more inclusive, and environmentally friendly spaces for families.

Looking ahead, the future of sustainable tourism in Malaysian water theme parks looks bright. The demand for family-friendly, safe, and eco-friendly tourism spots is rising. Water parks are likely to increase their use of smart technologies, such as digital safety alerts, mobile app features, and interactive safety zones. Stronger partnerships between park operators, government entities, and visitor communities will help develop more inclusive and forward-looking tourism models. Growing environmental awareness will also motivate parks to use clean energy, improve waste management, and create eco- friendly attractions. By focusing on safety and sustainability, Malaysia’s water theme parks can remain attractive destinations for family tourism.

The findings also highlight the need to improve parental education efforts. Malaysian water theme parks should think about introducing child safety briefings or workshops at entry points to raise awareness of available safety features and emergency protocols. Mobile apps that offer safety guides and real-time alerts could help parents feel more confident as they navigate the park.

Additionally, partnering with educational institutions to create child safety campaigns could foster a safety culture among children and families before their visit. Finally, adding multilingual safety signs and hiring trained multilingual staff would enhance the experience for both local and international tourists, especially in busy locations like Sunway Lagoon and LEGOLAND Malaysia.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study contributes to the fields of family tourism and child safety in recreational settings by addressing a gap in the existing literature. It offers insights into the safety concerns and experiences of parents visiting water theme parks with their children. The study also provides a clearer understanding of the factors that affect parental satisfaction and decision-making when choosing family-friendly destinations. Moreover, it presents practical recommendations for water theme park operators, policymakers, and tourism authorities. These can help improve child safety standards by identifying best practices and pointing out areas that need more development. These findings can inform future research focused on improving safety protocols and implementing specific actions to create safer and more enjoyable family travel experiences

Despite these contributions, the study points out several limitations. First, the research took place only in Malaysian water theme parks, which may limit how the findings apply to other tourism settings or cultural contexts. Second, relying on self-reported data from parents could lead to response biases or inaccuracies in recall that might affect the accuracy of the results. To improve future research, similar studies should be done in various regions and cultural settings. This would help broaden the usefulness of the findings and provide a better understanding of child safety in family tourism destinations. Additionally, including qualitative methods like in-depth interviews or focus group discussions might reveal deeper, emotion-based perspectives. This could enhance the quantitative data and provide more detailed insights into how parents perceive things and make decisions.

Future research should look into the views of more key stakeholders, such as water theme park operators, policymakers, and industry regulators. This will help gain a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities related to improving child safety. Including multiple perspectives can lead to the creation of better and more lasting safety strategies. Long-term studies are also important to track how safety measures affect family travel habits, child development, and the appeal of family tourism destinations. These studies will offer valuable insights into the lasting effects of improved safety practices.

This research highlights the strong need to prioritize child safety in Malaysian water theme parks, which has wider implications for family tourism spots around the world. It calls for ongoing teamwork among park operators, policymakers, and tourism authorities to create safer and more child-friendly spaces that meet family needs and support the long-term health of the industry. This study also encourages future researchers to expand on its findings to further improve the knowledge and practices in the area of family tourism and child safety.

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ARTICLE

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# Internal Measurement of Service Quality and Employees' Relations in Muslim Friendly Hotels

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## ABSTRACT

The increasing demand for Muslim-friendly hotels (MFHs) in Malaysia requires a deeper understanding of the factors driving service performance. While external factors are well-studied, internal dynamics are less understood. This study addresses this gap by integrating the Internal Measurement of Service Quality (INTQUAL) model with employee relations to predict service performance from the employee perspective. A quantitative survey of 390 MFH employees was analyzed using PLS-SEM. The findings revealed that the model explained 72% of the variance in service performance. Both INTQUAL dimensions (management expectation, $\beta = 0.258$; service reliability, $\beta = 0.259$) and employee relations (superior's influence, $\beta = 0.184$; coworker's influence, $\beta = 0.215$) were significant positive predictors.

Keywords: Employees' Relations; Internal Measurement of Service Quality (INTQUAL); Muslim Friendly Hotels; Service Performance

Article Classification: Research Paper

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Malaysia was the most preferred destination for Muslim travelers worldwide in 2018 and 2019, contributing over 5 million tourists annually. The positive numbers of Muslim travelers visiting Malaysia have resulted from the Malaysian tourism industry's capability to implement Muslim-friendly tourism products (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2020). Muslim Friendly Hotels (MFHs) are one of the tourism products available in Malaysia. The business concept of MFHs is considered one of the most popular in Muslim tourism, not only in Malaysia but also around the globe. The Muslim-friendly-based operation offered in MFHs provides halal food and covers the whole area of service operation (Albattat et al., 2018).

However, some studies describe the MFH business in Malaysia as lacking and weak, particularly in service standardization and operational requirements. Hence, the operating system of MFHs is still unstable as loopholes in the operational side of MFHs are found in several studies (Albattat et al., 2018). According to Jais and Marzuki (2018), the operating manual, procedures, implementation guidelines, quality standards, circulars, and terms of reference that are considered necessary in the MFHs are still not adequately established. The government's lack of proper service guidance and consultation also led to high uncertainty among MFHs administrators (Razak et al., 2019). For example, Quran recitations and the Adzan being too loud for non-Muslim guests are challenges that may affect an MFH's service performance (Razak et al., 2019).

Expanding the discussion around MFH service performance is crucial. Thus, this study aims to help MFHs improve their service performance by using Internal Measurement of Service Quality (INTQUAL) and considering the role of employee relations. This study addresses a critical gap in the literature. While many studies have examined MFH service quality from the customer's perspective or focused on external operational challenges, few have measured it from the employee's viewpoint using a validated internal framework. Furthermore, how formal internal processes (INTQUAL) interact with informal social dynamics (employee relations) to collectively predict service performance in the unique context of MFHs remains underexplored. Recent evidence also suggests that integrating AI-supported service training has improved Muslim-friendly hotel operations in Malaysia and Indonesia (Aziz & Rahim, 2025). Moreover, sustainability-oriented MFHs in 2024 were shown to link service quality and staff well-being as core determinants of guest satisfaction (Latif & Noor, 2024)

Therefore, this study aims to achieve the following objectives:

To determine the effect of management expectation on service performance in MFHs, three objectives are: (i) to assess the effect of service reliability on service performance in MFHs, (ii). to examine the influence of superior relations on service performance in

MFHs, and (iii) to investigate the influence of coworker relations on service performance in MFHs.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Internal Measurement of Service Quality

To meet the objective of this research, an adapted service quality model, INTQUAL (Caruana & Pitt, 1997), is derived from the Service Quality (SERVQUAL) model developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988). It focuses on measuring the level of service quality from the perspective of employees, compared to the SERVQUAL model, which identifies the level of service quality from customer responses. This metric is used as a two-dimensional service quality measure: (1) the management of expectations and (2) the reliability of services. Previous research has proven that INTQUAL is an appropriate model to measure the level of service quality from the employees' perspective in the Malaysian hotel industry (Zailani et al., 2006). The dimensions of INTQUAL were implemented in this study to measure the level of service quality provided by service employees in MFHs.

Recent evidence also suggests that integrating AI-supported service training has improved Muslim-friendly hotel operations in Malaysia and Indonesia (Aziz & Rahim, 2025).

### 2.2 Employees' Relations

Employee relationships are one of the most important relationships a person can have with his/her coworkers. Employee relationships can be interactions between individuals and their coworkers, supervisors, and organizations (Brooke, 2022). Cross (1973) measured three aspects of employee relations, and two aspects are generally characterized in the literature on leader-member exchange (LMX) and team member exchange (TMX). Leader-member exchanges emphasize the value of interactions between subordinates and managers (Xie et al., 2020). The LMX theory is a relationship-based, dyadic theory of leadership. LMX theory strongly focuses on the idea that leaders influence employees in their team (referred to as members) through the quality of relationships they develop with them. A good quality relationship is characterized by honesty, commitment, mutual respect, and loyalty (Xie et al., 2020; Biggs et al., 2016). Meanwhile, the Team-Member Exchange (TMX) was first identified by Seers (1989) and originated from LMX research. High-quality exchanges are focused on confidence, loyalty, and mutual responsibility, while low-quality exchanges are bound by job contracts (Chen, 2018; Wech et al., 2009). Team-member interactions are like LMX but include coworkers rather than superiors. The idea is that high-quality exchanges are reciprocal and contribute to better results. Leader-member exchanges and TMX are essential predictors of work satisfaction, organizational engagement, and turnover intentions (Chen, 2018;

Major et al., 1995). The value of LMX and TMX cannot be understated, and this research aims to draw on their contribution to employees working in MFHs. The concept established in this study is that the dimensions of the relationship between employees consist of the influence of superiors and coworkers, which influence MFHs service performance. In other words, individuals' relationships with their coworkers, their managers, and the company may affect the success of MFH's service performance. A 2024 study by Al-Hassan and Idris emphasized that mutual trust and inclusive leadership strongly affect internal service motivation among hotel employees (*highlighted new citation*). Additionally, a 2025 comparative analysis found that Islamic leadership principles foster higher LMX quality and employee engagement in Muslim hospitality institutions (Yusoff et al., 2025). Moreover, sustainability-oriented MFHs in 2024 were shown to link service quality and staff well-being as core determinants of guest satisfaction (Latif & Noor, 2024).

### 2.3 Service Performance

Service performance can be defined by core elements such as efficiency and quality in providing durable solutions to customer problems. In this study, service performance is measured through three critical dimensions: convenience perception, complaint resolving, and customer service (Hanafi & Ibrahim, 2018; Hoang, 2016). It is crucial to ensure that MFHs' service performance is improved, as higher performance will form a more optimistic picture in the minds of both Muslim and non-Muslim customers. Improved service performance also encourages repeat visits from customers, leading to improved customer loyalty. Moreover, sustainability-oriented MFHs in 2024 were shown to link service quality and staff well-being as core determinants of guest satisfaction (Latif & Noor, 2024).

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed quantitative, cross-sectional research methodology to quantify relationships within a new conceptual framework using a one-time data collection method (Creswell, 2014). A total of 390 employees from MFHs in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor participated in this study. A convenience sampling technique was employed, and the questionnaire was distributed via social media platforms. This sampling strategy was deemed necessary due to access constraints and health restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic, which limited the feasibility of in-person data collection. The limitations associated with this method are addressed in the conclusion. Items from Zailani et al. (2006) were adapted for measuring management expectation and service reliability, while items developed by Biggs et al. (2016) were adapted for superiors' and coworkers' influence. Service performance items were adapted from Hanafi and Ibrahim

(2018). Data was analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), and significance was computed using the Bootstrapping method with 5000 replications (Hair et al., 2017).

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Measurement Model Analysis

The measurement model analysis indicated that all items used for measuring the variables in this model were valid from the convergent validity aspect (Table 1). It is because the factor loading values were above 0.70, and then the value of Average Variance Explain, Composite Reliability, and Cronbach's Alpha was also above 0.50 and 0.70 (Hair et al., 2017). The HTMT ratio analysis also indicated that each variable in this model was discriminated against since the ratio value was below 0.90 (Henseler et al., 2015). Therefore, it confirms that each variable in this model can be considered to have optimal convergence and discriminant validity.

Table 1. Convergent validity for the measurement model

| Indicator | Loading | AVE | γ | α |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Management Expectation | | | | |
| I am confident that my hotel promotes our service with utmost responsibility on information validity (ME1) | 0.826* | 0.728 | 0.930 | 0.904 |
| I believe that my hotel shows great value and cares for both Muslim and Non-Muslim guests (ME2) | 0.903* | | | |
| I have a good idea about what Muslim and Non-Muslim guests expect from our service (ME3) | 0.908* | | | |
| I believe that regular contact with Muslim and Non- Muslim guests can enhance our understanding of customer expectations (ME4) | 0.895* | | | |
| I am confident that regular contact with guests will enhance our understanding of guests' expectations (ME5) | 0.720* | | | |
| Service Reliability | | | | |
| I believe that in my hotel, performing the services ethically to both Muslim and Non-Muslim guests is our main target (SR1) | 0.866* | 0.748 | 0.937 | 0.916 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| I can provide service to Muslim and Non-Muslim guests accurately and promptly (SR2) | 0.872* | | | |
| I believe that my hotel trained me to provide quality service to both Muslim and Non-Muslim guests (SR3) | 0.833* | | | |
| I am confident that my hotel always encouraged me to find a way to delight both Muslim and Non-Muslim guests (SR4) | 0.860* | | | |
| I am confident that all employees are trained to be clear on their career paths through quality and excellent service performance (SR5) | 0.893* | | | |
| Superior's Influence | | | | |
| I am confident that my superiors always respect me and my coworkers (SI1) | 0.866* | 0.778 | 0.946 | 0.929 |
| I often receive recognition and appreciation from my superiors (SI2) | 0.905* | | | |
| I find it easy to communicate and work with my superiors (SI3) | 0.901* | | | |
| I believe that my superior always encourages a positive working relationship (SI4) | 0.900* | | | |
| I am confident that my superiors did not favor certain groups or individuals over others (SI5) | 0.837* | | | |
| Coworker's Influence | | | | |
| I can work efficiently with the majority of my coworkers (CI1) | 0.897* | 0.785 | 0.948 | 0.931 |
| I have never come into conflict with my coworkers (CI2) | 0.902* | | | |
| I find it easy to work in a group with my coworkers (CI3) | 0.881* | | | |
| I am confident that I have a positive working culture with my coworkers (CI4) | 0.874* | | | |
| I can have a positive working environment while performing service to Muslim and Non-Muslim guests (CI5) | 0.876* | | | |
| Service Performance | | | | |
| I believe that the guests can feel safe in their transactions with me (SP1) | 0.774* | 0.756 | 0.939 | 0.918 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| I believe that my hotel has up-to-date equipment complying with Muslim Friendly Practice (SP2) | 0.914* | | | |
| I believe that my hotel always tries to improve the service procedures to ensure guest satisfaction (SP3) | 0.910* | | | |
| I am confident that guests' honoring programs are good and done regularly (SP4) | 0.879* | | | |
| I believe that my hotel provides high-quality service to Muslim and Non-Muslim guests (SP5) | 0.862* | | | |

Note: AVE = Average Variance Explained; γ = Composite Reliability; α = Cronbach's Alpha; *p <0.05.

Table 2. HTMT discriminant analysis for measurement Model

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (1) | - | | | | |
| (2) | 0.812* | - | | | |
| (3) | 0.792* | 0.799* | - | | |
| (4) | 0.813* | 0.784* | 0.851* | - | |
| (5) | 0.875* | 0.861* | 0.823* | 0.817* | - |

Note: (1) = Management Expectation; (2) = Service Reliability; (3) = Superior's Influence; (4) = Co-worker's Influence; (5) = Service Performance; *p <0.05.

**4.2 Structural Model Analysis**

The structural analysis revealed that management expectation, service reliability, superiors' influence, and coworkers' influence variables could explain around 72% variance in service performance variables. The analysis also indicated that management expectations and service reliability have a medium effect on service performance. In contrast, the superiors' and coworkers' influence can be considered a small effect size relationship. In addition, all independent variables were found to have a positive, statistically significant effect on the dependent variable at a 5% significance level since the p-value was below 0.05 (Hair et al., 2017). It is also confirmed by the BCa Bootstrapping confidence interval analysis, where the 95% confidence interval did not consist of the value zero (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 3. Structural model analysis

| Path | β | t-statistic | p-value | 95% BCa Bootstrap | f2 | Remark |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ME → SP | 0.258 | 5.604** | <0.01 | (0.108, 0.412) | 0.156 | Medium |
| SR → SP | 0.259 | 5.641** | <0.01 | (0.113, 0.425) | 0.161 | Medium |
| SI → SP | 0.184 | 2.015* | 0.045 | (0.013, 0.364) | 0.025 | Small |
| CI → SP | 0.215 | 2.419* | 0.016 | (0.095, 0.374) | 0.054 | Small |

Note: ME = Management Expectation; SR = Service Reliability; SI = Superior's Influence; CI = Co-worker's Influence; SP = Service Performance; β = Path Coefficient; f2 = Effect Size; The bootstrap sample was 5000 samples; *p <0.05; **p <0.01.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Undeniably, INTQUAL and employees' relations contribute significantly to the improvement of service performance for MFHs. By referring to the results of data analysis, it shows that if the average level of management expectation, service reliability, superior's influence, and coworker's influence were simultaneously high, then simultaneously it will increase the average level of service performance. On the other hand, the analysis also revealed that management expectation and service reliability were the primary factors affecting service performance because both path coefficient values were approximately high. Besides that, the role of employee relations was also identified as another important factor in leading employees to provide excellent service, especially in terms of coworkers' influence and superiors' influence. Based on the above discussion, the paper offers several theoretical implications.

Findings from this study will substantially expand the body of knowledge relating to the level of service performance in MFHs. As past studies relating to MFHs focus on operational challenges aspects, this study has its novelty through the implementation of the INTQUAL model and employees' relations in improving the level of service performance in MFHs. A 2024 study by Al-Hassan and Idris emphasized that mutual trust and inclusive leadership strongly affect internal service motivation among hotel employees. Additionally, a 2025 comparative analysis found that Islamic leadership principles foster higher LMX quality and employee engagement in Muslim hospitality institutions (Yusoff et al., 2025). Moreover, sustainability-oriented MFHs in 2024 were shown to link service quality and staff well-being as core determinants of guest satisfaction (Latif & Noor, 2024).

Findings from this study also provide confirmation whether the hypotheses constructed based on findings from existing literature are supported or rejected, thus enabling the researcher to identify similarities or differences compared to previous findings. In addition, the validated tools of INTQUAL that are used in measuring the level of service performance in MFHs will enable future academic studies to be adapted for research on MFHs at government offices, universities, the private sector, and government-linked companies. This paper also contributes to practical implications for the MFHs segment. It is expected that this research will help inform how successful INTQUAL has been in measuring the service performance of MFHs. This may be beneficial for the MFHs administrators in making improvements to encourage their service operations to improve the service quality. MFHs administrators will also have better knowledge and understanding of the level of employees' relations through the findings of this study.

The implementation and evaluation method of INTQUAL and employees' relations on the MFHs can potentially enable the Malaysia Association of Hotels (MAH) and Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) in making improvements to encourage further the development of MFHs conforming to Muslim Friendly principles. Besides, these findings will also benefit in terms of better knowledge, skill, and understanding when operating MFHs provided by agencies affiliated with the Ministry of Tourism and Culture. A limitation for this study is that the analysis of MFHs level of service quality was conducted during a pandemic. There is great uncertainty whether the progress of MFHs service performance would differ looking given the progress of the outbreak. Therefore, it is useful to review the MFHs service performance after the endemic, as it might help to measure the MFHs service quality from different angles. In addition, it is recommended for future studies to be carried out focusing on top-level management of MFHs as it may provide a different insight of MFHs service performance.

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ARTICLE

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# The Key Factors Influencing Learning in The Language Classroom from Tourism Students' Perspective: A Qualitative Study of Higher Education Institutions in Malaysia

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## ABSTRACT

This study was conducted at a higher educational institution in Malaysia. The purpose was to observe the factors that influence the learning behaviour of tourism students in two different classrooms. The same language was taught in modern and traditional classrooms. The research design was qualitative in nature; semi-structured interviews and class observations were conducted. The data revealed that the comparison of two different classrooms gave different results. The findings indicated that in the modern classroom, tourism students were happy and enjoyed learning a language owing to factors such as round table seating arrangement, multimedia facilities, less proximity to the instructor, creativity, and amicable class environment. These factors resulted in improved motivation and engagement in class activities, heightened confidence, less shyness, courage to ask questions, peer correction, attentive behaviour, and a more focused approach to accomplishing the tasks. However, the traditional classroom with a linear seating arrangement created problems for the students who used to sit in the back rows and were unable to view clearly. Moreover, high proximity created distance between the instructor and tourism students, and they were found shy to ask questions, and free movement was restricted.

Key words: Classroom; Communication; Motivation, Engagement; Learning

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Several educators believed that the seating arrangement is a critical factor for learning performance, which is a pivotal factor in giving positive learning outcomes and learning behaviour. This study was conducted to observe the learning behavior of the tourism students in two different classrooms with two types of seating arrangements: rows or linear arrangement in the traditional classroom and circular arrangement in the modern classrooms. The objective of this study is to explore the factors that influence tourism students' learning behaviour in the classroom, acknowledging that the factors can result in an effective learning environment that corresponds with the students' interests (Suwandi et al., 2025).

Fewer studies have been conducted on the classroom seating arrangement and its effects on students' learning performance (Haghighi & Jusan, 2012; Hoekstra et al., 2023). This paper examines the impact of seating locations on classroom learning from the perspective of the students from the tourism department. Specifically, it examines the impact of seating on a) student learning behaviour, b) student and teacher relationships, c) attention, and d) student classroom participation. However, active engagement and participation in the learning experience positively promoted the use of higher-order thinking skills as indicated by Flynn et al. (2009), McKeachie (1990), and Stronge (2007). This research attempts to provide insight for educators, who may consult this study for methods of enhancing student engagement, attention, and the creation of a conducive learning environment within the classroom that results in enhanced learning of students of tourism education (Chau, 2025).

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the 1920s, German psychologist Otto Köhler presented a theory known as the "Köhler Effect". He found that when two people completed a joint task, the individual performance of the weaker member was improved. Therefore, weaker students could not influence the good ones, but they themselves improved their performance. According to this effect, the stronger students will inspire and motivate them. This, in turn, would mean that the less-able students would work harder and perform better. In the twenty-first century, the idea emerged that the physical factors such as lighting, space, ventilation, and cleanliness, were equally important (Conners, 1983; Granstrom, 1996; Matlab, 2017) for good learning outcomes and promoting teamwork (Rohani et al., 2017).

In 1950, the traditional seating pattern was dominant with rows of seating in the classroom where the teacher used to speak, and students listened to the teacher (Tanahashi, 2007). In the following years, for active, task-oriented learning, semi-circle and cluster seating patterns were introduced (Lotfy, 2012). In the mid-1990s, educational research focused on classroom environment from the perspective of either teacher or student (Angela & Kathryn, 2011). The research of Kostourous and Olivier (2014) emphasized students' freedom to choose their seats by themselves for comfort and a long span of attention in the classroom. Later, the concept of a conducive learning environment was introduced, and it surprised the educational world as teaching and learning both were affected by seating arrangement (Lotfy, 2012). However, the configuration of furniture, space, and room dimensions could also lead to negative students' performance (Atherton, 2005; Gifford, 2002). The classroom design might be favorable to enhance students' performance. On the other hand, the seating arrangement heightened the instructor's ability to teach in the best manner. To uplift the standard of teaching and learning, teachers needed to have a variety of seating plans which would influence class environment, students' behaviour, and achievement. Teachers' class management skills also contributed to students' learning outcomes (Chingos, 2013; Ngware et al., 2013). It was also observed that the inappropriate layout demotivated students and teachers' efficiency. However, for a variety of class activities, students required changes in the seating arrangement for a high level of motivation, engagement, and participation (Hammang, 2012).

Alberto et al. (2010) and Juhary (2012) indicated that students' position in the classroom corresponded directly to their performance. In his observation, students who were sitting in front were more motivated than those sitting at the back. Thus, students' performance and teaching, and learning methods were dependent on the physical factors. Both classroom capacity and size influenced the performance of students and teachers. It was observed that a conducive learning space proves to be effective for the teaching and learning process (Yelkpieri, 2012). Bonus and Riordan (1998) supported the notion that students were more attentive when the seating arrangement in the classroom was set in accordance with the instructional goals.

From the perspective of confidence, the studies of Peter et al. (2015) found that the physical layout improved the confidence and engagement level of students. Healthy interactions were developed among students and between students and teachers. Consequently, students scored quite good. The classroom environment had a direct impact on students' grades, especially interaction between students and teachers, while highlighting a healthy and enjoyable learning process (James, 2016). Idayu et al. (2016) elaborated that if students' learning needs were addressed, the space layout of the classroom was appropriate, then a healthy environment would facilitate collaborative learning. Mudassir and Norsuhaily (2015) emphasized that a healthy and supportive learning environment enabled students to be more motivated and engaged in class activities. The studies of John (1999), Wannarka and Ruhli (2008), and Juson (2010) proved that seating arrangement improved students' behaviour in the classroom. They were more attentive and engaged in class activities. Students' social interaction was healthy, thus resulting in positive learning outcomes.

The study of educational literature, especially the studies of Ramli et al. (2013), Ngware et al. (2013), Khan and Mushtaq (2012), highlighted the physical layout, classroom capacity, student behaviour, course conducted, and student achievement and challenges as important factors, as shown in Figure 1.

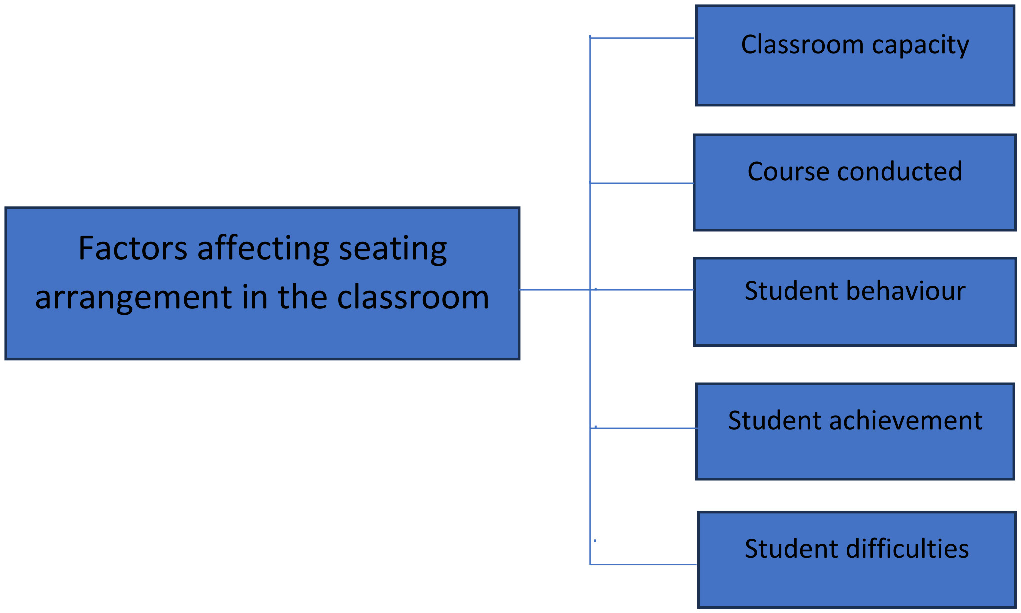



Figure 1. Influencing factors for the selection of seating arrangements in the classroom (Ramli et al., 2013; Ngware et al., 2013; and Mushtaq and Khan, 2012)

Studies of Chieu and Cheng (2016) and Reinke (2019) emphasized keeping the students actively engaged in the classrooms in order to achieve learning outcomes. Zong et al. (2022) mentioned that "Student engagement plays an important mediating role in the relationship between teaching factors (such as learning curriculum and teachers' teaching quality) and students' learning gain".

In the language learning classroom, organizing activities was an effective way to enhance students' motivation (Reinke, 2019) noticeably in the blended classrooms in higher education (Evians et al., 2020; Serrano et al., 2019). The physical classroom environment, specifically seating arrangements (Cornell, 2002; Haghhighi & Jusan, 2012), was found to be a crucial factor to boost students' attention, engagement, and participation in the language learning process in the blended learning environment (Clinton & Wilson, 2019; Evian et al., 2020; Ochola & Achrazoglou, 2015; Serrano et al., 2019).

### 2.1 Instructional Paradigm and Students' Behaviour

The physical classroom layout represented the instructional paradigm and linked with students' attitudes, behaviour, communication, engagement (Bolden et al., 2019; Ochola and Achrazoglou, 2015; Park & Choi, 2014), students' social connections inside the classroom (Vercellotti, 2017; Wilburn et al., 2019), and academic performance (Lewinski, 2015). Baron (1992) and Lotfy (2012) highlighted that the priority should be given to the classroom seating arrangement in the creation of a classroom environment with the objective of maximizing students' participation in the activities. Lewinski (2015) also pointed out that the most powerful tool to improve students' high performance is the seating when effectively arranged in the blended learning setting (Evian et al., 2020; Serrano et al., 2019).

### 2.2 Three-dimensional Effects

The study of educational literature indicated three-dimensional effects of the seating arrangement on student engagement and commitment. Firstly, the relationship between seating arrangement and students' level of communication and social interaction with classmates was observed (Harmer, 2007; Wannarka and Ruhl, 2008), as mentioned in Figure 2.

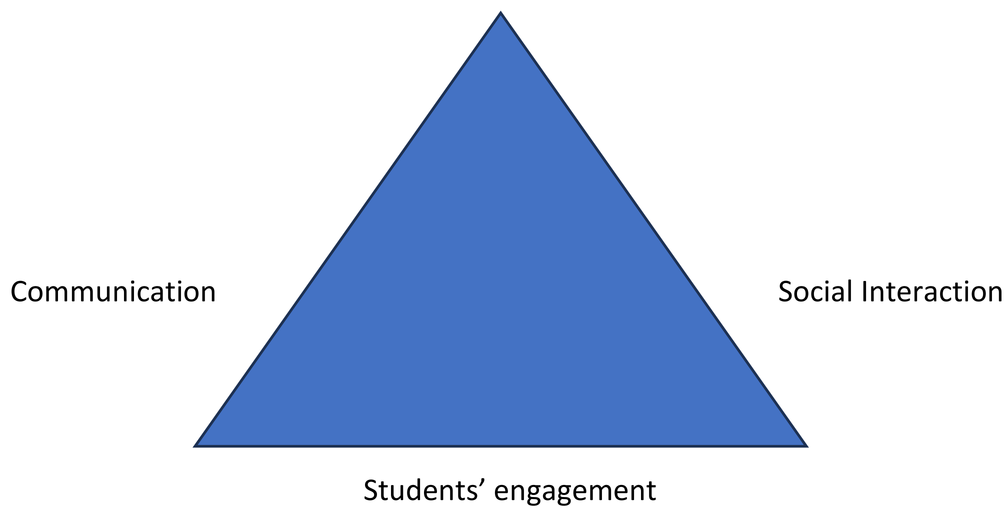
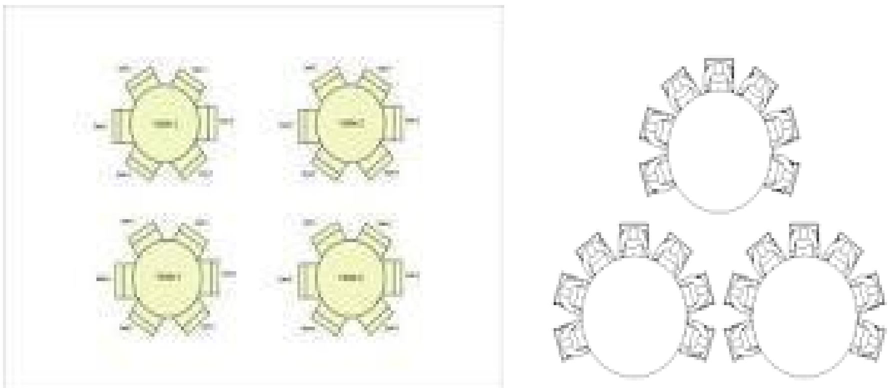



Figure 2. Three-dimensional effects of the seating plan

Considering the rows and columns arrangement, the whole classroom space was used. It is convenient from the teachers' perspective for students' monitoring, and at the same time, students view the teacher and interact easily. This arrangement was beneficial for lecturing and watching the videos (Harmer, 2007; Ochola & Achrazoglou, 2015). However, students could not see other students, and those at the back could not be viewed clearly. However, rows were considered unfavorable for peer communication and interaction within the classrooms. In addition to this, students in front could not see other students, and students at the back had poor visibility of the instructors and screen, which lessened their engagement in activities (Shernoff et al., 2017; Wei et al., 2018).

### 2.3 Seating Configuration and Students' Performance

On the contrary, semicircular or circular arrangements were found to be more suitable and avoided positional discrimination in blended learning (Park and Choi, 2014). Therefore, teachers were found to move, provide quick feedback, facilitate students' discussions, and group work than in rows and columns (Kinahan, 2017). From the students' perspective, they sit closer and maintain direct eye contact (Harmer, 2007). Students in group seating enjoyed social interaction with peers; they asked more questions than in rows and columns seating arrangement (Gremmen et al., 2016; Lotfy, 2012). The seating plans are shown in Figure 3.



**CIRCULAR** **SEMI CIRCULAR**

Figure 3. Seating patterns in the classroom

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This research is a qualitative study. A case study approach was used "to study the characters in a life situation" (Yin,2009). The research instruments, such as semi-structured interviews and class observations, suited the best for this study in a higher education institution in Malaysia. By using the case study approach, this research explored the impact of seating arrangement on students' behaviour in the classroom in higher education. The interview protocol was designed with fourteen questions. The interview time was arranged at the convenience of the interviewees.

Two groups of tourism students from the Undergraduate Programme of a public university in Malaysia were selected through probability sampling. From group 1, students A, B, C, D, and E were interviewed. They used to sit in the modern classroom equipped with the latest facilities, and the layout was cluster seating with round tables and chairs. From group B, students X, Y, and Z, who learned in a traditional classroom with a linear seating arrangement, were interviewed for this study. They were given freedom to choose their seats as well as their peers. They were assigned various tasks and activities to complete within the classroom. The same interview protocol was used for both groups. Using the research instrument of class observations, data were collected by observing the students from both groups. Fallout (2014) explained an observation process in which he used a “teaching attribute instrument; qualitative notes of behaviors.” (P.6). Throughout the semester, students were observed in the classroom with special focus on their communication, attention, engagement, interaction, and environment. The data was analyzed through codes and themes (Saldana, 2021). To check validity and reliability. The interview protocol was pilot tested with a few students and lecturers, and the questions were well understood. Then the formal interviews were recorded.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data was analyzed inductively through codes and themes. The data revealed interesting findings.

### 4.1 Seating Arrangement

The data analysis revealed that the Tourism students preferred the round table layout for the benefits such as comfort, peer support, motivation, quick learning, focus, easy access to the instructor, and engagement in group work.

Student A indicated:

*“Yes, I am satisfied with the circular arrangement. I communicate easily with the teacher…I enjoy working in groups. I really prefer a circular arrangement because I can see everyone and I can get to know everyone as we are closer, and it creates closer bonding among us”.*

Student B stated that she gained confidence and courage to ask questions due to the comfortable layout:

*“Seating arrangement is circular and quite good because I have become more confident to ask the questions, and I am no more a shy person..”*

Student C expressed his views and his joy to have the freedom to sit and work with his peers:

*“I am satisfied because I can sit anywhere, I move easily, and I am more attentive than in the traditional classroom with rows and columns*.”

Student D shared her opinion about her attention span due to the cluster arrangement:

*“Seating arrangement makes it easier to pay attention to the teacher because we aren’t far from the teacher, so she can see us, so we just need to focus on our work.”*

Student E showed her satisfaction with the seating arrangement:

*"Yes, I am satisfied with the circular seating arrangement in the French classroom."*

Student X expressed his discomfort with the rows of seating in the traditional classroom, which hindered visibility and learning in the back rows of the classroom:

*"In rows, it's quite difficult to interact with classmates for group work. Also, it makes it difficult to watch the slides….I prefer a round table seating arrangement because I don't have to turn my back to see the slides. Around the tables, communication is easy and helpful."*

Student Z shared his problem of visibility from the back rows in the traditional classroom:

*"Sometimes it becomes difficult to have a clear vision of a teacher, which makes interaction difficult as well."*

**4.2 Attention and Engagement**

It was found that the cluster arrangement was quite effective in facilitating attention, engagement, and bonding among the students and the instructor. However, the linear arrangement created problems for tourists as the view was obstructed by the students, who were sitting in the front rows, especially students with weak eyesight who had a big problem of unclear vision. It was also found to be time-consuming to move back and forth and engage in the class activities with peers.

Student A highlighted the bonding and connection developed due to the seating arrangement:

*"This kind of arrangement creates bonding between us, and we can pay more attention to the teacher and activities…the seating arrangement makes it easier to pay attention to the teacher. Because whenever we sit around the table, all students can pay attention and focus on what the teacher is teaching. I am actively engaged in class activities for learning the French language".*

Student B explained her views about her improved motivation in group work:

*"Yes, I am attentive in class. The circular seating is helpful for paying attention in class. Because when I see my friends working in class, I feel motivated, they give me motivation, rather than I sit alone, and focus alone, and don't participate in clas,s and don't say anything".*

Student C shared his experience. She highlighted that, unlike rows, it is much easier to pay attention to the teacher:

*"Seating arrangement really helped me because the teacher is in front of me, so I have to be more focused and engaged in class activities…. It's easier to pay attention with this*

*seating, there is no blocking from the person in front of you, so you can easily pay attention to the teacher."*

Student D praised the modern language learning classroom:

*"Yes, I am attentive in the French classroom. I love French so much, I love the classroom."*

Student E shared his opinion that he is engaged in activities:

***"****Yes, I am attentive in the French classroom… with circular seating arrangement, it is definitely easier to pay attention to the teache*r…. I am attentive and engaged in class activities*."*

**4.3 Class environment**

The findings indicated that the round table seating created a positive and healthy class environment. Tourism students were found to be happy to have good communication, interaction, and easy movement, and enjoyed learning in the classroom, but in the traditional classroom, the learning process was difficult.

Student A highlighted:

*"Seating arrangement makes the environment comfortable and flexible. In the traditional classroom with rows, you cannot communicate easily with your classmates, but in a circular classroom, we can engage ourselves easily in activities together easily.*

Student B shared her opinion on easy communication:

*"Seating arrangement makes the environment comfortable and flexible because when we sit in a circular arrangement, we can see each other and we can communicate easily without the need to move around. In circular seating, we can see our classmates and their expressions, how they react to our answers, or how they motivate us to answer or support us whenever we work in groups."*

Student C highlighted his sentiments:

*"Yes, I enjoy working in groups. Circular makes learning more interesting, you sit around the tables, you can have more friends, it makes us feel bonded there compared to just rows."*

Student D expressed her opinion:

*"The physical layout keeps us attentive and engaged. It's helpful and we don't need to move around, we choose our seats and work in groups, and helpful in group discussions…, it makes the environment flexible and comfortable. We did a lot of activities in French class. So, it's easy for us to sit around the tables and work, and we discuss a lot."*

Student E praised the flexible class environment:

*“Comfortable, yes, seating arrangement makes class environment flexible and comfortable, and we have freedom to choose where we choose to sit anywhere in class.”*

Student Y shared his experience:

*“I prefer round tables for learning French as a foreign language as learning a new language is quite hard. You need a fun environment and modern equipment. “*

**4.4 Interaction & Communication**

It was found that the cluster seating proved to be useful in establishing effective communication and healthy social interaction among students and between students and teachers. The close seating encouraged effective communication.

Student A expressed her positive opinion:

“*When my friends and I are around the table, we can communicate easily since we can see each other’s faces and communicate easily as we are close to each other. So, communication becomes more effective.*

Student B expressed her view that sitting next to her friends around the table gave her a sense of belonging:

*“When I sit near my friends, I feel connected with each other rather than far from them or sitting alone*…. When I don’t understand anything, *I can refer to my friend, or we can refer to our lecturer easily. This is how physical layout helps in effective communication.*

Student C expressed his views on easy communication due to the layout in the room:

*“Yes, I communicate easily, it really facilitates social interaction, it does feel too far in the room, you feel close to your friends.”*

Student D expressed his joy in sitting with classmates, which enhanced his motivation and engagement:

*“We communicate easily during class activities…. It's quite easy for us to interact and work in groups with this arrangement… the seating arrangement makes it easier to pay attention to the teacher because we aren’t far from the teacher, so she can see us, so we just need to focus on our work.”*

Student E shared his opinion about easy interaction in groups:

*“Yes, I communicate easily with the teacher…it facilitates social interaction with my classmates in groups…. I enjoy working in groups…. We sit in groups, which eases group activities.*

*I ask my friends and we do group work together, so it eases class work and activities. This is how physical layout plays an important role."*

According to student X:

*"Yes, it is easy to communicate with teachers because we can easily catch teachers' attention, and it is easy to communicate."*

Student Y expressed the difficulty in communication with peers due to rows:

*"Sitting in rows is kind of not easy because we are sitting side by side, we have to move to communicate with peers, it's time-consuming…."*

**4.5 Confidence**

It was found that tourism students gained confidence due to the physical layout in the clusters as they worked with peers in the groups, which enhanced the peer correction and consequently heightened the level of confidence. They preferred the circular seating to rows as rows were found to be less facilitating.

Student A gave his opinion:

*"Everything is perfect and fine. I really like this type of arrangement, and I enjoy French class very much."*

Student B compared the two seating arrangements:

*"Circular seating is better than traditional for learning of French language. I enjoy working with my friends in groups. I prefer a circular arrangement because I have gained confidence. Round tables are better and easier for group work and communicating with teachers."*

Student C spoke highly about easy learning in the clusters.

*"Definitely, the seating arrangement makes learning easier than traditional rows or columns. I would prefer sitting closer to my friends for task-based learning, it doesn't matter which shape, but the important thing is that we sit closer to each other, we learn together, where we connect better with friends and the teacher."*

Student D shared his opinion:

*"To participate in activities with classmates in a traditional classroom is a bit hard. Group members must move from their places to make a group. It involves movement, which loses interest and motivation."*

**4.6 Proximity**

The data revealed that students from the modern classroom were satisfied with the learning environment and highlighted proximity to the teacher in a cluster seating arrangement. Direct contact proved to be beneficial in establishing healthy interaction with teachers, reading the PowerPoint slides, and asking questions to teachers. It was also convenient for both students and teachers. In row setting, the last rows created an inconvenience to communicate with the teacher, to remain attentive, and focused. Also, students talk in the back rows and distract others. Sometimes the teacher fails to satisfy students' questions.

Student C shared his views about his learning experience in rows:

*"In rows setting, the second row is fine, but the last row, you feel so left behind. My attention span will be very short, and I will be easily distracted. In a circular arrangement, the space is big, you can move around, the lecturer can see students better, and students can see the lecturer better."*

Student D emphasized the benefits of the circular seating plan:

*"The circular arrangement is quite convenient because it's not far from my teacher, so it's close to my teacher and my classmates, so when we talk to each other. Even though it's easy for the teacher to hear us and see what we are doing."*

Student E complained about the disadvantages of less proximity:

*"Because in lecture halls, the class is very big, so when we sit sometimes, we have to talk louder with discomfort, but when we sit closer, we feel that we are close to the teacher and it's easy to ask questions, we just raise our hands, easy if any problem."*

*Student F explained the discomfort in rows:*

*"We have to move and change our places to form a group with the members, and that's time-consuming and requires movement."*

**4.7 Class Observations**

The class observations were conducted with tourism students in two classrooms, A and B, throughout the semester. Classroom A was a modern classroom, equipped with round tables and modern facilities for French language learning, whereas classroom B was traditional with the row arrangement. The observations of group A indicated that students were much more enthusiastic and motivated than group B. In group A, improved interpersonal communication was observed in students' learning behaviour. It was found that the circular layout of the modern classroom was quite convenient and comfortable for the students. Students picked the seats of their choice and sat with their friends, enjoying friendships while productively working in groups. Their classmates were constantly assisting each other in discussions to accomplish the given language tasks around the tables. Tourism students exhibited excitement, enthusiasm, and motivation as soon as they entered the classroom. Some of them entered the classroom about 20 minutes before class. They sat and did collective reading, while turning the pages of colorful French picture books with great zeal, and exchanged views with their friends. They enjoyed collaborative learning while exploring French as a foreign language.

Creativity was encouraged through videos, animations, and French websites to learn and express point of view. Students' attendance, motivation, and confidence were observed to be heightened, and fear of teachers and learning a foreign language was diminished. Creativity was observed in groups as well. The weak students were supported by the brighter ones. Mutual learning developed a culture of caring and sharing. Students were found attentive and disciplined. Even when the lecture was over, it seemed that students did not feel like leaving the classroom and remained thrilled and excited in the room with their classmates. Learning with peers and peer correction of errors in oral production around the tables was noticed. While correcting the pronunciation, peers giggled and teased each other. The act of asking questions both to the teacher and their classmates indicated a positive sign of curiosity for learning and attentive behaviour in class. Changes in tourism students' thinking, attitude, and behaviour were noticed. Students were found to be more responsive in groups in the circular seating arrangement than in rows.

The social constructivist elements of learning were facilitated by the grouped seating by making the teacher more accessible, as the distance between students and teacher was less, and the content was comprehensible. Students' engagement dominated their classroom activities, which led to a positive ambiance. Students were found to be highly engaged in language-related tasks such as watching videos on YouTube, exercises, worksheets, and dialogue writing. Each member concentrated on the activity, participated with vigour, and enjoyed the process of learning by doing with their classmates sitting around the table. It was found that learning in groups in a circular seating arrangement sharpened students' thinking process and cooperation through interaction with peers for the completion of tasks. High energy level, enthusiasm, and dynamism were found among groups. Even the quiet and timid students' performance in class improved as well. All the group members gave their input in mutual discussions and did research work together with high motivation. Each group member was found focused and absorbed in the tasks.

The element of collectivity was discovered to be stronger, such as the collective thinking process and collective research for vocabulary and synonyms, etc. The creative group presentations uplifted the excitement of the class. And made the class environment interesting. Weaker and less confident students were found to learn from the active students. Open communication, healthy interaction, a sense of competition, and motivation to perform better than others were manifested by the students. It was noticed that students' creativity was at its peak in working with peers in groups Cross cross-questioning and comments among the groups, peer correction of French pronunciation, and repetition exercises with peers. Mime session, theatrical presentations, freedom of expression and movement in the classroom, noise, laughter, friendly environment, freedom of performance, fun, fun-based learning were the noticeable elements in the modern classroom with the circular seating. A variety of styles of group performances and presentations also created humor in class.

On the other hand, group B in the traditional classroom with rows was found to be passive. Students who were sitting in front were more motivated and attentive than those sitting at the back. The level of engagement also varied among students. The ones having less proximity to teachers were more productive than others. From the perspective of behaviour, students sitting in the back rows were found chatting, playing with their cell phones, and distracting others. Teachers had to point them out and make an effort to keep them engaged in class activities. The level of attention and engagement was lower. In the rows of seating, teachers had to work harder on the group formation, movement was difficult, and some of the students preferred to stand near their classmates to participate in group work. It was found to be more time-consuming and less convenient for the students.

This enquiry was made to study students' learning behaviour in a traditional and a modern classroom designed for the learning of French as a foreign language. The study probed into the relationship of seating arrangement with students' learning behaviour while focusing on students' engagement in class activities, confidence, communication, social interaction with the teacher, and students. Both modern and traditional classrooms have their positive and negative aspects. Circular classrooms created strong communication, bonding, and a sense of belonging among the students. They learned more quickly with their peers sitting around them at round tables and were more motivated, engaged, and learning. The physical layout of the classroom represented the instructional paradigm and linked with students' attitudes, behaviour, communication, engagement as highlighted by Bolden et al., (2019), Ochola and Achrazoglou (2015), Park and Choi (2014), students' social connections inside the classroom as mentioned by Vercellotti (2017), Wilburn et al. (2019) and academic performance (Lewinski, 2015).

The data indicated the fact that students around tables established face-to-face direct contact joyfully than those seated in columns and rows, as mentioned by Steinzor (1950) and Gump (1987). Considering the rows and columns arrangement, it was convenient from the teachers' perspective for students' monitoring, and students could view the teacher and interact easily. Those from the back rows found it difficult to interact with the teacher, and visibility was less clear. However, this arrangement was beneficial for watching the videos, as mentioned by Harmer (2007), Ochola and Achrazoglou (2015). At the same time, the students could not see other students, and those at the back could not be viewed clearly. Hence, rows were considered unfavorable for peer communication, which created inconvenience for engagement in activities as mentioned by Shernoff et al. (2017) and Wei et al. (2018).

## 5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This research was qualitative in nature and was conducted at a higher education institution in Malaysia. The Case study approach was used to study the key actors: the students from the Undergraduate programme who were studying French as a foreign language and as an optional subject. The research instruments were semi-structured interviews of the students and class observations throughout the semester in both traditional and modern language learning classrooms. The type of seating arrangement and its effects on students' learning behaviour in the classroom were closely studied. Two different seating arrangements, circular and rows, were chosen through purposive sampling. Two groups of students who were learning in two different classrooms with different layouts were closely observed and interviewed.

The findings revealed that rows were good for individual work. The students in the front rows are more attentive as they face the teacher than those who sit at the back. Group work becomes challenging in the rows as students are bound to move and change their places and physically adjust themselves to engage in group activities. This consumes time and becomes a wasteful strategy. On the other hand, students in the back rows face problems such as focus, attention, and asking questions becoming difficult, and reading the content from PowerPoint slides is also a hassle due to the lack of visibility. Collaborative learning becomes exhaustive in this seating arrangement. On the contrary, semicircular or circular arrangements are proven to be more suitable and avoid positional discrimination in blended learning. Considering the rows and columns arrangement, the whole classroom space was used. It is convenient from the teachers' perspective for student monitoring, and at the same time, students viewed the teacher and interacted easily. This arrangement was beneficial for lecturing or watching the videos, but not for group work. Therefore, teachers were found to move, facilitate students' discussions, and group work than in rows and columns. From the students' perspective, they sit closer and maintain direct eye contact. Students in group seating enjoyed social interaction with peers; they asked more questions than in rows and columns seating arrangements.

Three-dimensional effects of the seating arrangement on students' engagement and commitment were proven. Firstly, the relationship between seating arrangement and students' level of convenience of communication and social interaction with classmates and teacher was stronger in circular seating. Students' performance, creativity, confidence, motivation, and enthusiasm for learning were prominent features, as well as peer support, peer correction, and a culture of collaborative learning dominated the classroom. The weaker ones also show their involvement and good performance after sitting with the bright students. A culture of caring and sharing and a sense of belonging was instilled within the classroom community, with overall positive effects on learning, emotions, and well-being owing to the circular seating arrangement. For practical implications, this study identifies the learning factors that facilitate social, educational, psychological, and institutional development. It indicates the strategies of the students' learning process within the classroom through effective teaching methodologies, a classroom environment, physical layout, student-instructor relationships, motivation, and engagement.

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ARTICLE

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# Sustainable Camping Practices Among Malaysian Youth

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## ABSTRACT

Camping has become increasingly popular among Malaysian youth; however, its environmental consequences, including soil erosion, wildlife disturbance, and pollution, remain underexplored. This study investigates the relationship between youth campers' travel behaviour, conservation practices, and environmental impacts. Employing a quantitative approach, data were collected via structured online questionnaires from 159 Malaysian campers aged 18–30. Descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation analysis revealed a strongly positive relationship between youth campers' travel behaviour and environmental degradation ($p < .001$), with campers' preferences emerging as the most influential factor ($r=0.913$). In stark contrast, campsite conservation practices exhibited a very weak positive correlation ($p<.001$). These findings highlight the critical need for targeted educational campaigns and policy measures focused on behaviour-driven strategies to promote sustainable camping practices and mitigate ecological harm. The study adds to the ecotourism literature by highlighting the dominance of individual choices over management practices in determining environmental outcomes.

Keywords: Conservation practices; Environmental impact; Malaysia; Sustainable Camping; Youth travel behaviour

Article Classification: Research Paper

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Camping is an enjoyable outdoor activity where individuals stay temporarily in tents or various shelters, appreciating nature, wildlife, and fresh air. Many campers visit designated campsites that offer amenities such as electrical outlets, showers, and restrooms; these campsites are typically located in national parks and forests and often require reservations well in advance. Campers participate in canoeing, biking, and hiking activities and pack necessary items such as cooking gear, tents, and sleeping bags. Proper food storage is crucial to prevent drawing in wild animals, which reinforces the importance of responsible camping. Fundamentally, camping offers a means to escape urban life, strengthen social bonds, and develop an appreciation for adventure and community.

Campsite conservation practices have garnered increasing attention recently to counteract the negative biophysical impacts of recreational camping. Since 2020, management approaches have increasingly emphasised visitor regulation, such as limiting group sizes and controlling the frequency and duration of site use, to reduce cumulative impacts on soil, vegetation, and wildlife (Mallikage et al., 2021). Regular monitoring of environmental indicators, including soil compaction, vegetation loss, tree damage, exposed roots, and litter, provides crucial data for adaptive management. Educational initiatives have also been introduced to increase campers' awareness of responsible behaviours, including proper waste disposal and minimising disturbances in natural habitats. Research indicates that environmental degradation, such as soil erosion and vegetation loss, can occur regardless of campsite usage frequency, making it imperative to implement proactive conservation strategies.

Malaysia currently has over 7,000 campsites, including Mutiara Taman Negara in Pahang, which offers river cruises, forest treks, and nocturnal wildlife viewing, and Kuala Mu in Perak, a remote site within the Piah Forest Reserve offering rainforest exploration and Temiar cultural experiences. These sites illustrate the diversity of Malaysia’s camping offerings, blending nature-based activities with cultural engagement. Recent safety concerns have accelerated regulatory reforms, particularly following the Batang Kali landslide tragedy, which claimed 31 lives. The newly approved *Camping Site Planning Guidelines* mandate safety measures, such as maintaining a 10-metre distance from waterfalls, and provide operators two years for full compliance (The Star, 2023). These guidelines also integrate environmental sustainability and legal requirements. While campsite operators, such as AsiaCamp Sdn Bhd, faced initial challenges adapting to these regulations, they acknowledge their long-term benefits for safety and sustainability. Environmental organisations, including Sahabat Alam Malaysia, emphasise strict adherence to these measures to protect ecosystems, prevent future incidents, and promote responsible tourism.

Beyond safety governance, environmental impacts from campground operations and visitor behaviour pose another challenge. Campers' preferences increasingly influence sustainability outcomes, with some brands, such as Camper, adopting circular design strategies and certified materials to meet rising consumer demand for eco-friendly products (Camper, 2023). However, research in sensitive areas like Kinabalu Park reveals that tourism activities, including hiking, birdwatching, and sightseeing, can cause soil erosion, vegetation loss, litter accumulation, and wildlife disturbance (Latip et al., 2020). Weak waste management and inadequate visitor controls exacerbate these issues. Addressing these intertwined safety, regulatory, and environmental problems is essential to developing practical guidelines that prevent future tragedies while promoting sustainable camping practices.

Despite increasing attention on both management strategies and visitor regulation, a critical research gap remains in understanding whether individual camper actions or established campsite conservation practices have a greater impact on environmental degradation. The existing literature often addresses these factors in isolation, failing to provide a clear, relative comparison of their influence. This study directly addresses this gap by quantitatively assessing the relative influence of youth campers' behaviour versus campsite management efforts on environmental impacts. By confirming the stronger correlation of camper behaviour, this research provides a more explicit rationale for shifting strategy toward behaviour-driven interventions. This focus is essential for developing practical guidelines that prevent future tragedies while promoting sustainable camping practices, thereby enhancing the perceived contribution to behaviour-driven strategies in the ecotourism literature.

Overall, camping remains a dynamic tourism segment that offers recreational, social, and environmental value. However, its sustainability depends on integrated management strategies, regulatory enforcement, and continuous education to ensure natural resources are preserved for future generations while meeting campers' evolving expectations.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Conservation Practices

Conservation methods address challenges such as high water flows, soil degradation, and pollution through nature-centred approaches, whose effectiveness depends on technical viability, ecological stability, economic feasibility, and community acceptance (Srivastava et al., 2023). Implementation barriers include limited knowledge, restricted equipment access, financial constraints, and site-specific soil conditions. In the United States, farmland conservation faces additional challenges due to the high proportion of land owned by non-operator landowners (NOLs). Programs like CRP, WRP, EQIP, and CSP exist, but NOL awareness and engagement remain low, and short-term rental agreements discourage long-term investment. Nonetheless, NOLs generally trust renters and may adopt conservation clauses if supported with adequate information (Petrzelka et al., 2021). The Konso community in Ethiopia applies long-standing indigenous soil and water conservation (SWC) methods, including stone terraces, agroforestry, crop rotation, and conservation agriculture, rooted in sociocultural traditions and supported by local institutions (Gashure & Wana, 2023). Similarly, Nyamuriro Wetland conservation in Uganda involves wetland restoration, community participation, and monitoring, with restoration receiving the highest community support. However, corruption, invasive species, flooding, and inadequate funding persist (Turyasingura et al., 2022). These cases illustrate the importance of locally adapted, community-driven strategies supported by technical, institutional, and financial resources.

### 2.1.1 Waste

Effective waste management is essential for campsite conservation in Malaysia, where broader national strategies can inform site-specific practices. General principles, such as waste segregation, recycling, composting, and waste-to-energy conversion, are crucial for reducing environmental impacts (Azlina Muhammad et al., 2023). Malaysia generates over 30,000 tonnes of municipal solid waste daily, necessitating integrated supply chain solutions and transitioning to a circular economy that extends product lifespans and reuses resources (Sundram et al., 2016; Vatumalae et al., 2022). Public education on separation at the source and biodegradable material use is vital for transforming waste behaviours (Sivan et al., 2023). Lessons from the construction sector underscore the importance of reducing, reusing, recycling, and material recovery and adopting technologies, such as building information modelling, to address illegal dumping through more vigorous enforcement (Lim & Norazman, 2024; Chan, 2021). In camping contexts, waste—from organic scraps to packaging and human waste—can pollute soil and water, harm wildlife, and degrade natural surroundings (Potapova, 2018). The persistence of non-biodegradable materials illustrates the importance of *Leave No Trace* principles and designated sanitation facilities. Organic waste dominates campsite refuse, requiring effective composting and recycling to minimise carbon footprints and promote sustainable outdoor recreation (Malakahmad et al., 2017).

### 2.1.2 Use of Utilities

Electricity use in campsites can influence plant growth, ecosystem balance, and sustainability. While electric fields and currents can enhance plant biomass and photosynthetic efficiency (Dannehl, 2018), improper applications may disrupt electromagnetic fields, alter wildlife behaviours, and affect plant metabolism. Nonrenewable energy use for campsite lighting and amenities increases carbon emissions, undermining sustainable practices. Additionally, electricity generation and transmission introduce pollutants—such as electromagnetic fields, noise, and vibrations—that can reduce biodiversity by causing plant DNA mutations and altering animal behaviour (Liu et al., 2020; Havas et al., 2017; Glibovytska et al., 2024). In Malaysia, energy management for campsite conservation emphasises sustainability through renewable energy adoption, efficient resource usage, and waste management. The strategy includes reduction efforts and environmental education (Jing et al., 2023). Legislative measures, such as the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Act (EECA) 2023, regulate energy efficiency and promote conservation among large consumers, offering principles transferable to campgrounds (Hasim et al., 2021). Complementary strategies from the 11th National Energy Efficiency Action Plan (NEEAP) support renewable energy integration, including hydropower and solar, aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (KeTTHA, 2015). Standards like MS ISO 50001:2011 systematically monitor efficiency gains while fostering environmental values among younger generations, strengthening long-term conservation behaviours (Mohd Tarmizi Mat Asim et al., 2017).

#### 2.1.3 Safety

Tourism safety management is essential for sustaining a positive destination image and visitor satisfaction, with high crime rates posing significant threats to the industry (Ahmad et al., 2024). At Pahang National Park, safety strategies aim to mitigate risks and enhance visitor trust, a key factor in sustainable tourism development. In Chamang Forest Eco-Park, drowning risk management employs the Risk Assessment Management System (RAMS), integrating objective assessments—site observations, staff interviews, and hazard identification—with subjective evaluations of visitor perceptions. Findings highlight the importance of high visitor numbers in safety planning, affirming RAMS's applicability for nature-based tourism (Azizi Zainal Abidin et al., 2023). Campsite safety management requires routine facility inspections, fire safety enforcement, proper waste management, wildlife monitoring, and emergency preparedness measures, supported by comprehensive visitor education (Abdullah, 1995). Negeri Sembilan introduced the Campsite Planning Guidelines (GPP) following the 2022 Batang Kali landslide, setting structured criteria for site suitability, land zoning, tent placement, and essential facilities (Malay Mail, 2024). The GPP aims to reduce risks from natural disasters while promoting responsible camping, granting existing operators a compliance grace period until the end of 2024. Collectively, these measures illustrate a multi-layered approach to safety in tourism, balancing risk mitigation with industry growth.

### 2.2 Environmental Impacts

Human, animal, and industrial activities have caused severe environmental degradation, intensifying since the Industrial Revolution and resulting in air, water, and soil pollution, deforestation, and waste accumulation (Wang et al., 2021). Healthcare contributes approximately 5% of global $CO_2$ emissions, ranking as a major polluter after the energy sector (Williams et al., 2024). Emissions arise from energy-intensive operations, transport, and medical product lifecycles, alongside impacts such as water and energy consumption, waste generation, chemical contamination, and resource depletion. Sustainable clinical practices, disease prevention, and integration of environmental considerations into health technology assessments are vital for reducing the sector's footprint. Environmental regulations influence economic activity through two competing perspectives: the Pollution Haven Hypothesis, which argues that strict regulations shift pollution-intensive industries to countries with lenient policies, and the Porter Hypothesis, which posits that such regulations stimulate innovation and competitiveness (Dechezleprêtre & Sato, 2020). While short-term costs include reduced productivity and trade shifts, long-term benefits may outweigh these impacts through emissions reductions and clean technology growth. Environmental conditions also affect human health positively—through exposure to nature, enhancing physical and mental well-being (Frumkin, 2001)—and negatively, via hazards like radiation, industrial chemicals, and pathogens (Seymour, 2016; Ali, 2001). Sustainable practices are essential to mitigate these risks (Ezzati, 2002).

### 2.3 Campers' Preferences

Campers increasingly seek unique, authentic, and transformative experiences aligned with sustainability, inclusivity, and personal growth values. Generation Z, in particular, prioritises life-enriching adventures over material possessions, pursuing cultural immersion and social connection through tech-enabled research, social media, and travel apps (Ahmad & Idris, 2024). A study at Murog Purog Camp Site (MPCST) in Kota Belud, Sabah, found that most visitors were female (68.6%), aged 21–30 (91.5%), unmarried (92.9%), and highly educated (82.9% with a diploma or degree). The majority were students (87.1%) from Sabah districts, including Kota Belud, Kudat, Semporna, and Tawau. The location, scenic beauty, river quality, and unique flow were key attractions. The structure and diverse activities contribute to high satisfaction with facilities and services, including utilities, online reservations, and staff quality (Alex Jo Marjun et al., 2024). At Min House Camp (MHC) in Kelantan, preferences for community-based ecotourism (CBE) are centred on comprehensive "super" packages that offer immersive environmental and cultural experiences, strong local participation, and clear, informative communication about activities and community impacts. These findings highlight that contemporary campers value meaningful, well-facilitated, and socially responsible tourism experiences, emphasising the necessity of integrating environmental quality, cultural engagement, and service excellence in camping destinations (Abdullah et al., 2024).

### 2.3.1 Mode of Transportation

Transportation exerts substantial environmental and ecological impacts on campsites, contributing to air, noise, and soil degradation. Vehicular emissions, including carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, hydrocarbons, and particulate matter, deteriorate air quality, exacerbate global warming, and pose health risks such as respiratory and cardiovascular diseases (Asaf Aliyev et al., 2024; Shadimetov & Ayrapetov, 2024). Noise pollution from road traffic, often exceeding 80 dBA, disrupts wildlife and human well-being (Jacyna, 2017). Transportation infrastructure fragments habitats, accelerates soil erosion, and increases water pollution, altering local ecosystems (Əliyev, 2017; Perera et al., 2022). Vehicles in campsite areas can compact soil, reduce vegetation cover, and modify hydrological patterns, leading to sedimentation in nearby water bodies (Perera et al., 2022). At Kuro-dake Campsite, the ropeway and chairlift systems enhance accessibility but also facilitate overcrowding, vegetation loss, and bare-ground proliferation, particularly from campers using non-designated sites (Wang & Watanabe, 2019). Increased access may also attract less environmentally conscious visitors, intensifying ecological strain. Mitigation strategies include promoting cleaner fuels, enforcing stricter emission standards, implementing noise reduction measures, and encouraging sustainable transport modes such as public transit, carpooling, cycling, and walking. Effective management of transportation impacts is critical to preserving campsite ecological integrity and ensuring long-term sustainability.

### 2.3.2 Frequency and Duration of Stay

Frequency and duration of stay are critical determinants in campsite design, management, and environmental sustainability. Visitor behaviour patterns—shaped by psychological time allocation, spatial factors, and environmental cues—can be optimised through strategic amenity placement, such as shaded seating and picnic areas, to regulate flow and prevent overcrowding (Wang & Huang, 2024). Greenery enhances stay length, supporting both comfort and experiential quality. Environmentally, frequent short visits may heighten transportation-related $CO_2$ emissions, whereas extended stays can elevate on-site emissions. The emissions production includes the consumption of resources such as water and energy (Deb et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, prolonged stays can foster stronger environmental connections, encouraging adherence to conservation principles such as *Leave No Trace* and participation in local stewardship programmes (Wang et al., 2017). Conversely, inadequate management of extended stays risks increased waste generation, soil compaction, vegetation loss, and wildlife disturbance (Moghimehfar et al., 2017). This case illustrates the importance of balanced strategies that leverage more extended visits' educational and stewardship potential while mitigating ecological degradation. Integrating sustainable infrastructure, eco-friendly technologies, and targeted visitor education can align economic and experiential benefits with environmental preservation. Ultimately, the ecological outcome of camping activities depends on aligning stay patterns with responsible management practices to maintain campsite ecological integrity over the long term.

The current literature highlights the distinct impacts of conservation practices (e.g., waste, utility, safety) and camper behaviour (e.g., transport, duration, preferences) on environmental quality. However, a significant debate and knowledge gap persist regarding the relative dominance of these two factors: whether management's preventative measures or individual visitor actions are the primary drivers of environmental impacts. Existing research does not consistently differentiate the magnitude of these influences, making it difficult for policymakers to allocate resources effectively.

Furthermore, there is a distinct lack of empirical studies focusing specifically on the sustainable camping practices of Malaysian youth campers (aged 18-30), a demographic with significant potential to shape future tourism norms. This study, therefore, aims to fill these gaps by explicitly testing the strength of the correlation between two independent variables (camper behaviour and conservation practices) against environmental impacts to provide a more explicit, data-driven directive for conservation policy in Malaysia.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Measurement of Variables

This study uses a quantitative research design to examine the relationships between camper travel behaviours (IV1), campsite conservation practices (IV2), and environmental impacts (DV). Data will be collected using structured questionnaires with items measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 5 = *Strongly Agree*). Camper Travel Behaviour is assessed through items measuring the frequency of camping trips, travel distance, transportation mode, and environmentally responsible travel behaviour. Example item: “I usually choose eco-friendly transportation when going camping.” As for Campsite Conservation Practices, it is measured via items evaluating campsite management’s environmental initiatives, including recycling, sustainable resource use, and environmental education. Example item: “This campsite promotes recycling.” In the meantime, Environmental Impacts is evaluated based on perceived and observed effects of camping activities on the natural environment, including litter, wildlife disturbance, pollution, and vegetation damage. Example item: “Wildlife is frequently disturbed by campers.” In this study, a purposive sampling technique will target campers and operators with direct experience in camping activities. The sample size will be determined based on participant accessibility and the requirement for sufficient data for robust statistical analysis.

### 3.2 Timeframe and Sampling Limitations

The sample comprised 159 respondents, exceeding the minimum threshold of 75 suggested by Shore (2009) for reliable quantitative research outcomes, thus enhancing the accuracy of the data. Participants included individuals who completed the questionnaire and were directly involved in camping-related activities.

Data were collected via online questionnaires over a six-week period in July and August 2024, distributed through digital platforms. This study employed a non-probability convenience and purposive sampling technique, selected for its practicality and efficiency (Nikolopoulou, 2022). While practical, this approach restricts the generalisability of the findings to a broader population of Malaysian campers and may introduce selection bias. A more in-depth discussion on this is necessary to ensure transparency. Future research is strongly recommended to consider probability sampling methods (e.g., stratified or cluster sampling) to minimise bias and enhance the representativeness of the results.

### 3.3 Instrument Structure, Reliability, and Validity

The final questionnaire consisted of 25 items, including demographic questions and sections for each variable. Camper Travel Behaviour was measured with eight items, Campsite Conservation Practices with eight items, and Environmental Impacts with nine items, all using a five-point Likert scale.

A critical omission in this study's methodology is the absence of empirical assessment for instrument reliability and validity, such as reporting Cronbach’s Alpha values or conducting Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). Given the acknowledged lack of pilot testing due to a mid-project change, conducting rigorous pilot testing is highly recommended for all future studies to ensure construct clarity and data robustness.

### 3.4 Ethical and Mitigation Measures

The study adhered to essential ethical considerations, including obtaining informed consent from all participants prior to commencing the survey and ensuring anonymity and confidentiality of responses through data aggregation. Technical difficulties during online survey distribution were noted, including inaccessible links and mobile device compatibility issues. To mitigate such issues in future studies, proactive measures should include pre-testing the survey link across multiple devices and browsers, employing a robust, commercial survey platform, and providing technical support contact information within the survey invitation.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Respondent Profile

A total of 159 respondents participated in the survey, providing demographic, motivational, and behavioural data related to camping activities (Refer to Table 1 for Demographic Profile).

#### 4.1.1 Demographics

The 159 respondents are largely defined by their educational and occupational status, with over half holding a bachelor's degree (55.3%, n=88) and exactly half being students (50.3%, n=80), while the next largest groups include those with a secondary school education (21.4%, n=34) and those employed full-time (32.7%, n=52). The minority of the sample consisted of male respondents (40.3%, n=64), who were least likely to be aged 26–30 years (19.5%, n=31), with only a small fraction holding a master's degree (2.5%, n=4) and the smallest segment of the sample being unemployed (1.9%, n=3).

#### 4.1.2 Camping Motivations:

Top Motivators were classified as adventure/exploration (76.7%, n = 122), affordability (64.8%, n = 103), relaxation/stress relief (61.6%, n = 98), connecting with nature (56.6%, n = 90), spending time with family/friends (54.7%, n = 87), and physical activity (54.7%, n = 87).

#### 4.1.3 Travel Companionship:

Most respondents camped with friends (28.3%, n = 45), followed by family (23.3%, n = 37), partners (22.0%, n = 35), alone (13.8%, n = 22), or in organised groups (12.6%, n = 20).

#### 4.1.4 Frequency of Camping:

Annually, the frequency of camping is 2–3 times (34.0%, n = 54), once annually (26.4%, n = 42), 4–6 times annually (20.8%, n = 33), and more than six times annually (18.9%, n =30).

The findings indicate that the camping population surveyed is predominantly young, educated, and student-oriented, with strong motivations linked to adventure, affordability, and nature-based experiences.

Table 1. Demographic Profile

| Demographic variables | Question Items | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 64 | 40.3 |
| | Female | 95 | 59.7 |
| Age | 18-21 | 65 | 40.9 |
| | 22-25 | 63 | 39.6 |
| | 26-30 | 31 | 19.5 |
| Education | Secondary school | 34 | 21.4 |
| | Diploma/Certificate | 33 | 20.8 |
| | Bachelor's degree | 88 | 55.3 |
| | Master's degree | 4 | 2.5 |
| Occupation | Student | 80 | 50.3 |
| | Employed (Full-time) | 52 | 32.7 |
| | Employed (Part-time) | 11 | 6.9 |
| | Self-employed | 13 | 8.2 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Unemployed | 3 | 1.9 |
| Motivation 1: M1 (Adventure & Exploration) | Yes | 122 | 76.7 |
| | No | 37 | 23.3 |
| Motivation 2: M2 (Relaxation & Stress Relief) | Yes | 98 | 61.6 |
| | No | 61 | 38.4 |
| Motivation 3: M3 (Spending time with family/friends) | Yes | 87 | 54.7 |
| | No | 72 | 45.3 |
| Motivation 4: M4 (Connection with nature) | Yes | 90 | 56.6 |
| | No | 69 | 43.4 |
| Motivation 5: M5 (Physical activity & exercise) | Yes | 87 | 54.7 |
| | No | 72 | 45.3 |
| Motivation 6: M6 (Affordability compared to other travel) | Yes | 103 | 64.8 |
| | No | 56 | 35.2 |
| Who do you usually travel with? | Alone | 22 | 13.8 |
| | Friends | 45 | 28.3 |
| | Family | 37 | 23.3 |
| | Partner | 35 | 22 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Camping group or organisation | 20 | 12.6 |
| How often do you go camping per year? | Once a year | 42 | 26.4 |
| | 2–3 times a year | 54 | 34 |
| | 4–6 times a year | 33 | 20.8 |
| | More than 6 times a year | 30 | 18.9 |

### 4.2 Result Analysis

The results in Table 2 indicate the 'moderate' average scores (M=3.0) for responsible travel behaviour (M=3.08), conservation practices (M=3.06), and environmental impacts (M=3.04) are based on a 5-point Likert scale (where 3 is the neutral midpoint). This result indicates that respondents generally operate at the neutral or 'neither-agree-nor-disagree' position. This is a crucial finding, suggesting that the youth camper population is neither highly responsible nor highly destructive, and their perceived impacts are neither very high nor very low. This 'moderate' level highlights a significant opportunity for interventions to shift behaviour from neutral to strongly agreeable with sustainable practices.

Table 2. Summary of all variables

| | Mean | Standard Deviation | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Campers' Travel Behaviour | 3.08 | 0.92 | Moderate level of responsible travel behaviour |
| Campsite Conservation Practices | 3.06 | 0.88 | Moderate engagement in campsite conservation efforts |
| Environmental Impacts | 3.04 | 0.89 | Moderate perception of environmental consequences |

The strong positive correlation between camper behaviour and environmental impact (r=0.881) confirms that individual actions are the most substantial driver of ecological degradation. While the overall link is clear, a deeper analysis reveals that the most damaging behaviours include collecting firewood, improper waste disposal, and heavy reliance on private vehicles for campsite access. These choices directly contribute to vegetation loss, soil pollution, and increased carbon emissions. The discovery that campers' preferences are the most influential factor on environmental impacts (r=0.913) provides the most actionable finding. This suggests that personal choices and inclinations are the primary drivers of negative environmental outcomes, surpassing the impact of frequency or mode of transportation. These preferences manifest as choices for resource-intensive activities (e.g., long-distance travel via RVs, high utility usage) or a preference for convenience over conservation (e.g., using private vehicles, not adhering to waste segregation). This implies that environmental harm is driven less by a lack of knowledge and more by a willful choice and a gap between pro-environmental attitudes and actual on-site practice (refer to Table 3).

Table 3. Correlation Analysis Between IV1 and DV

| | | **Campers' behaviour** | **Environmental impacts** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Campers' behaviour | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .881 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | <.001 |
| | N | 159 | 159 |

The analysis found a weak correlation between campsite conservation practices and environmental impacts, which is a critical finding. It suggests that management efforts alone are insufficient to counteract the stronger, cumulative effects of individual camper behaviour. This weak link could be attributed to a lack of rigorous enforcement of existing conservation rules, initiatives being perceived as token gestures rather than integrated practices, or simply being outweighed by the sheer scale of individual poor behaviour.

Further analysis of the conservation practices sub-attributes showed that utility usage (r=0.287) and waste generation (r=0.167) had a stronger, statistically significant association with environmental impacts than safety measures. (r=0.154). This combined result suggests that environmental mitigation efforts should be prioritised toward managing resources and waste through better recycling facilities and energy-efficient amenities, as these yield a more direct, albeit small, environmental benefit. While safety measures are paramount for visitor well-being, their direct link to ecological harm is minimal, underscoring the need for a multi-faceted approach where environmental and safety regulations are separately targeted and enforced (refer to Table 4).

Table 4. Correlation Analysis Between IV2 and DV

| | | **Campsite conservation practices** | **Environmental impacts** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Campsite conservation practices | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .101 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | <.001 |
| | N | 159 | 159 |

## 4.3 DISCUSSIONS

### 4.3.1 To examine the relationship between campers' behaviours and campsite conservation practices

The findings indicate that campers travelling longer distances demonstrate greater environmental awareness, possibly due to a higher investment in their trip. However, larger groups were associated with increased waste generation, indicating the importance of targeted waste reduction strategies. Transportation choice emerged as an essential factor: recreational vehicle (RV) users showed higher utility consumption, while hikers and cyclists demonstrated stronger waste management practices. Frequency The frequency of visits influenced rule compliance, as regular campers were more likely to follow established regulations than first-time visitors, highlighting the importance of educational outreach for newcomers. The length of stay was positively correlated. We established a correlation between declining adherence to safety measures like fire management, resource use, waste production, and extended stays. Practical conservation efforts were associated with the availability of recycling facilities, visible signage, and awareness campaigns. Arrival briefings and initiatives promoting responsible behaviour, such as alcohol consumption guidelines, could enhance safety.

### 4.3.2 To investigate the relationships between the environmental impact of campers' behaviour.

The Pearson correlation analyses examined the relationships between campers' behaviour, campsite conservation practices, and environmental impacts. The results indicate a strong positive correlation between campers' behaviour (IV1) and environmental impacts (DV) ($r = 0.881$, $p < .001$), suggesting that careless or harmful actions by campers substantially increase environmental degradation. In contrast, campsite conservation practices (IV2) demonstrated a very weak positive correlation with environmental impacts ($r = 0.101$, $p < .001$). While statistically significant, this relationship indicates that conservation measures alone have a limited influence compared to the impact of individual camping behaviours. Further analysis of IV1 attributes revealed that campers' preferences were the most influential factor, exhibiting a robust positive correlation with environmental impacts ($r = 0.913$). This effect size surpassed those observed for frequency/duration of stay ($r = 0.417$) and mode of transportation ($r = 0.101$). The findings suggest that personal choices and inclinations are closely tied to environmental consequences, possibly due to engagement in more resource-intensive activities. Developing targeted strategies to mitigate environmental impacts may require addressing these preferences.

### 4.3.3 To investigate the relationships between the environmental impact of campsite conservation practices.

The Pearson correlation analysis examined the relationships between campers' behaviours (IV1) and campsite conservation practices (IV2) and environmental impacts. Results indicated that campers' behaviour had a strong and statistically significant positive correlation with environmental impacts ($r = 0.881$, $p <.001$), suggesting that more careless or harmful behaviour was associated with greater environmental degradation. Among the attributes of IV1, camper preferences emerged as the most influential factor ($r = 0.913$), substantially exceeding the correlations observed for frequency/duration of stay ($r = 0.417$) and mode of transportation ($r = 0.101$). This study points out the vital importance of camper choices and inclinations in driving environmental outcomes. In contrast, campsite conservation practices demonstrated a very weak but statistically significant positive correlation with environmental impacts ($r = 0.101$, $p < .001$). This indicates that, while such practices are relevant, their direct effects are limited compared to behavioural factors. Analysis of IV2 attributes revealed that utility usage ($r = 0.287$) and waste generation ($r = 0.167$) showed stronger associations with environmental impacts than safety measures ($r = 0.154$), which exhibited the weakest link. These findings suggest that prioritising behavioural change among campers, particularly by addressing their preferences, along with targeted waste management and resource conservation improvements, would likely yield the most substantial benefits in mitigating environmental impacts.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The limitations of the study, specifically technical difficulties during the online survey and the absence of pilot testing, threaten the overall trustworthiness and applicability of the findings. The technical issues likely introduced non-response bias by excluding participants with limited digital access, while the lack of pilot testing may have compromised instrument clarity and data reliability/validity, ultimately restricting the generalizability of the results beyond the convenience sample. Future research should mitigate these risks by mandating rigorous pre-testing across all major digital platforms and including a clear Cronbach's Alpha analysis to ensure instrument reliability before final distribution. Crucially, the finding that campers' preferences are the most influential factor ($r=0.913$) necessitates a policy focus on changing these underlying inclinations to bridge the gap between pro-environmental attitudes and actual behaviour. Specific, actionable ideas include implementing educational campaigns (e.g., interactive videos at check-in) that link specific actions to environmental harm, enacting policy changes such as a mandatory 'Pack-It-In, Pack-It-Out' waste system, offering incentives for public transport, and using behavioural nudges like highly visible signage to simplify sustainable choices. Building on these results, future research should explore why these preferences exist and how to best encourage sustainable habits among young Malaysian campers.

The Pearson correlation analysis revealed varying strengths of relationships between campsite conservation practices and environmental impacts. Waste management practices demonstrated the strongest relationship ($r = 0.167$), followed by utility usage ($r = 0.287$), while safety recorded the weakest link ($r = 0.154$). These findings suggest that, while safety remains important for the overall visitor experience, its direct influence on environmental outcomes is less significant compared to wasteful and utility-related behaviours. The author gratefully acknowledges the respondents for their candid feedback on these attributes, which provided the empirical basis for identifying these nuanced differences.

An analysis of the campers' behaviour further highlighted that, although many participants expressed concern for environmental preservation, specific actions—such as collecting firewood or improper waste disposal—persisted. The study benefited greatly from the willingness of campsite operators to share operational insights, which supported a more accurate interpretation of these behavioural patterns. Contextualising the gap between environmental awareness and actual conservation practices would have been difficult without such cooperation.

Regarding travel behaviour, most campers reported arriving at campsites via private vehicles, a practice that contributes significantly to carbon emissions. This finding aligns with broader patterns in rural tourism mobility, where public transport access remains limited. The author extends appreciation to local tourism authorities for providing supplementary transportation data, which enhanced the reliability of this interpretation.

The research faced certain limitations, notably technical difficulties in distributing and completing the questionnaire. Some participants experienced inaccessible links and mobile device compatibility problems, leading to incomplete responses. The author wishes to thank those who persevered through these challenges to complete the survey, as their commitment ensured a more representative dataset despite these setbacks.
Another limitation arose from the mid-project change in research topic, which prevented conducting a pilot test. While this posed challenges in refining the instrument, the author acknowledges the valuable input from academic mentors and peers in reviewing the revised questionnaire to maintain its validity and clarity.

Despite these constraints, the findings provide a valuable foundation for future research. The behaviour of Malaysian youth campers emerges as a promising area for investigation. The author is grateful to the younger participants in this study, whose perspectives shed light on this topic. This section highlights the role of emerging generations in shaping sustainable outdoor recreation. Their voices reinforce the need for targeted education, more straightforward conservation guidelines, and behavioural nudges to bridge the gap between intention and practice.

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ARTICLE

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# Cultural Heritage Tourism in Kelantan: Youth Motivations and Revisit Intention

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**ABSTRACT**

This study explores the influence of motivational factors on youths' revisit intentions to cultural heritage destinations in Kelantan, Malaysia. Drawing on the push–pull framework, push motivations examined include rest and relaxation and knowledge seeking, while pull motivations focus on heritage characteristics and site accessibility. A quantitative research design was employed, with data collected through an online questionnaire survey targeting Malaysian youths aged 15 to 24 years. From a total of 198 responses, 159 were retained for analysis. Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS through reliability testing, descriptive statistics, and Pearson correlation analysis. The findings demonstrate that both push and pull motivations significantly affect revisit intention. Rest and relaxation and knowledge seeking were identified as salient internal drivers, whereas heritage characteristics and accessibility were recognized as critical external attributes attracting youths to revisit cultural sites. These results underscore the dual role of intrinsic and extrinsic factors in shaping youth travel behavior within the cultural heritage tourism context. This study contributes to the literature on youth tourism by providing empirical evidence on motivational influences in a Malaysian cultural heritage setting. The insights generated are valuable for destination managers and policymakers in formulating targeted strategies to enhance the attractiveness and sustainability of cultural heritage tourism in Kelantan. Addressing both psychological and site-related factors may strengthen destination competitiveness and foster long-term engagement among young travelers.

Keywords: Cultural heritage tourism; Kelantan attractions; Push–pull motivations; Revisit intention

Article Classification: Research Paper

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Cultural tourism has emerged as a vital sector of the global travel industry, promoting heritage preservation, fostering cross-cultural understanding, and stimulating economic growth (Hasan et al., 2024). Culture encompasses diverse traits and practices that shape both tourist experiences and host community identity (Lexhagen et al., 2022). In Malaysia, domestic tourism rebounded strongly in 2023, with visitor arrivals rising to 213.7 million, a 24.6% increase from 2022, and receipts expanding by 32.5% to RM84.9 billion (DOSM, 2024). Aligned with the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture's (MOTAC) Strategic Plan 2021–2025, the country aims to strengthen cultural tourism through 12.4 million tourist arrivals and RM1.05 billion in cultural revenue. Integrating cultural elements into destination strategies enhances branding and engagement (Lexhagen et al., 2022), while cultural attractions, festivals, and storytelling remain central motivators for travel (Seyfi et al., 2019).

Beyond economic contributions, cultural tourism supports sustainability by conserving heritage, extending tourism seasons, and strengthening community identity (MOTAC, 2024). United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) emphasizes that cultural heritage includes not only monuments and artifacts but also living traditions, performances, and oral practices that transmit knowledge across generations (Hasan et al., 2023). Preserving such legacies requires collective responsibility and multistakeholder collaboration (UNESCO, n.d.). Kelantan exemplifies this potential as the "cradle of Malay culture" (The Star, 2017; Nashir et al., 2022). The state is renowned for crafts such as *songket* weaving and *wau bulan* kite making, as well as performing arts including *wayang kulit*, *mak yong*, and *dikir barat*. Annual events such as the Kelantan International Kite Festival attract international visitors while reinforcing local identity (Hasan et al., 2024). Domestic arrivals increased from 6.6 million in 2022 to 7.5 million in 2023, underscoring a strong post-pandemic recovery (DOSM, 2024). Cultural tourism initiatives emphasize sustainability, community participation, and educational engagement to preserve authenticity amid modernization pressures (Hasan et al., 2024).

Youth engagement is particularly critical for safeguarding intangible heritage and shaping future tourism development. Understanding what motivates young travelers to participate in cultural experiences enhances strategies for sustainability (Hasan et al., 2023). Exposure to cultural festivals has been shown to instill pride and strengthen identity among younger generations (Ramely et al., 2021). Within the Sustainable Development Goals, Target 11.4 calls for strengthened efforts to safeguard cultural and natural heritage, highlighting the importance of youth involvement in ensuring cultural continuity (Ramely & Nor, 2021). This study is guided by two main research questions: whether push factors and pull factors influence youths' revisit intentions to Kelantan's cultural heritage destinations.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Overview of Tourism

The tourism industry has rapidly emerged as a key contributor to national economic growth and continues to serve as a vital sector in global development. According to the UNWTO (2023), countries with "broad tourism and hospitality sectors" demonstrate remarkable economic resilience while generating substantial revenue. Li, Othman, and Johari (2018) emphasized that many nations prioritize tourism given its long-term impact on economic growth. Beyond expanding its own domain, tourism creates significant spillover effects across related industries, fostering both economic development and employment opportunities.

Tourism is highly diverse, encompassing sectors such as cultural and heritage tourism, agrotourism, urban tourism, and adventure tourism. Su et al. (2018) highlighted that a considerable portion of global travelers seek new and unique culinary experiences, giving rise to special interest tourism, often referred to as gastronomic, food, or culinary tourism. These trends demonstrate the multifaceted nature of tourism and its ability to cater to diverse visitor interests. Bazargani and Kilic (2021) further noted the increasing attention from scholars and policymakers in analyzing the tourism sector's impact and identifying factors influencing its performance across time, regions, and nations. This growing interest has fueled extensive research into the tourism-led growth theory, supported by substantial empirical evidence (Roudi, Arasli, & Akadiri, 2019, as cited in Bazargani & Kilic, 2021).

Village-based tourism, as a subset of cultural tourism, is another rapidly growing niche. According to Zaitul et al. (2023), village-based tourism enables visitors to engage with the daily lives, customs, and traditions of local communities, offering authentic cultural experiences. Such developments highlight the growing significance of cultural tourism as both an economic driver and a cultural preservation tool. This study therefore, examines the performance of cultural and heritage tourism in Kelantan, Malaysia, and its influence on youth motivation. By focusing on this demographic, the research seeks to generate insights that enhance the appeal and sustainability of the sector.

### 2.2 Definition of Cultural Tourism

Cultural tourism refers to travel motivated by the desire to experience and engage with the culture, traditions, and heritage of a destination (Seyfi et al., 2019). It is broadly categorized into tangible and intangible assets. Hasan et al. (2023) described tangible assets as physical cultural products passed down through generations, including historic monuments, buildings, and other creative achievements. Conversely, intangible assets encompass practices, representations, knowledge, oral traditions, and skills valued by local communities (Hasan et al., 2023). Examples include performing arts, traditional crafts, and indigenous knowledge systems. Cultural tourism plays a vital role in both cultural preservation and economic development. The global cultural tourism market was valued at USD 5,321.7 million in 2022 (Seocanac et al., 2024), with projections indicating significant revenue growth in the next decade (Future Market Insight, 2023). This growth is driven by increasing demand for cultural destinations, rural tourism, and domestic cultural revival. However, Seyfi et al. (2019) argued that destination management often overlooks tourists' needs and experiences in designing memorable cultural encounters—an essential factor in repeat visitation. Similarly, Li et al. (2018) emphasized the importance of understanding visitors' preferences to foster loyalty. UNESCO advocates that cultural tourism, when managed with respect for local communities, heritage, and the environment, aligns with sustainable tourism principles.

Kelantan, known as "The Cradle of Malay Culture," is a prime example of a cultural tourism destination due to its rich historical and cultural assets (Ramely & Nor, 2021). With a population of approximately 1.858 million across 10 districts (City Population, 2023), Kelantan showcases diverse traditions ranging from traditional games and performances to historic buildings, local cuisine, and arts and crafts (Nashir et al., 2022; Hasan et al., 2023. The Kelantan Tourism Board aims to position the state as a leading destination for cultural tourism, ecotourism, and shopping (Nashir et al., 2022). Achieving this requires collaboration between the government, private sectors, and local communities, particularly involving youth as custodians of cultural heritage (Hasan et al., 2024). Research by Hasan et al. (2023) revealed that while youth travelers are familiar with Kelantan's cultural attractions, gaps remain in understanding the factors that drive their engagement. Azman et al. (2024) similarly found that youth attitudes and perceptions strongly influence their willingness to learn traditional practices, such as food-making and craftwork. Moreover, Nashir et al. (2023) emphasised the role of digital media in promoting Kelantan's cultural heritage among younger generations, yet highlighted the limited exploration of youth's active role in preservation and promotion.

### 2.3 Youth Motivation Components

Tourist motivation has been widely studied, with scholars examining various theoretical models, empirical contexts, and case studies. Tourism motivation has long been recognized as a key determinant of travel behavior, shaping both destination choice and revisit intention. Among the most widely applied frameworks is the push–pull model, originally introduced by Dann (1977), which conceptualizes motivations as arising from an interaction between internal psychological drivers and external destination attributes. Push factors are understood as the socio-psychological needs that predispose an individual to travel, such as the desire for relaxation, escape, or social interaction. Pull factors, in contrast, refer to the features of a destination that attract tourists, including natural landscapes, cultural heritage, accessibility, and facilities. This conceptual duality has been extensively applied in tourism studies, yet its relevance to specific groups, particularly youths and cultural heritage tourists, remains an evolving area of inquiry. Youth motivation, however, is particularly significant, as younger generations represent the future of cultural and heritage preservation (Hasan et al., 2023). Motivation can be categorized into push factors, which are intrinsic drivers, and pull factors, which are external attributes of a destination.

#### 2.3.1 Push Factors

Push factors are internal motivations that compel individuals to travel (Dann, 1977, as cited in Mshai et al., 2022), and these include the need for rest, relaxation, knowledge-seeking, adventure, personal growth, and social interaction (Urbanski, 2022). Rest and relaxation have been emphasized as fundamental needs for physical and psychological well-being (Bernhofer, 2016), with numerous studies confirming their importance in shaping revisit intentions. For example, Mwawaza et al. (2022) found relaxation and health to be the strongest motivators for visitors in Mombasa County, Kenya, while Dean and Suhartanto (2019) reported a strong relationship between relaxation and tourists' decisions to revisit creative attractions in Bandung, Indonesia. However, Duong et al. (2023) showed that relaxation was not a significant factor influencing tourists to Vietnam's Central Highlands, highlighting contextual differences. Another key push factor is knowledge-seeking, which involves the pursuit of meaningful cultural learning beyond mere information (Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Bates, 2005). Findings in this area are mixed, as Duong et al. (2023) found it to be the least influential motivator among visitors to Vietnam's Central Highlands, whereas Preko et al. (2018) demonstrated that young travelers in Ghana were motivated by learning from cultural and historical sites, and Baptista et al. (2020) identified cultural curiosity as a primary motivator in Timor Leste. These inconsistencies suggest that the significance of knowledge-seeking varies across cultural and geographical contexts, underscoring the importance of situational and demographic factors in shaping youth travel motivations.

#### 2.3.2 Pull Factors

Pull factors refer to destination-specific attributes that attract tourists (Arowosafe et al., 2021), including cultural heritage, landscapes, festivals, facilities, and accessibility (Tu, 2020). Heritage characteristics have been shown to play a central role in motivating cultural travel. For instance, Danez et al. (2023) found that heritage elements significantly influenced Generation Z's motivation to visit cultural sites in Tayabas City, while Anuar et al. (2023) reported that buildings and historical features strongly affected revisit intentions in Langkawi. Similarly, Baptista et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of historical heritage as a key driver for international tourists in Timor Leste. Another crucial pull factor is site accessibility, which shapes visitor experiences and overall satisfaction. Mwawaza et al. (2022) observed that accessibility had relatively less influence in Mombasa, yet Danez et al. (2023) demonstrated its importance among younger tourists in Tayabas City. Baptista et al. (2020) also highlighted that accessible transport links and supporting facilities contributed significantly to revisit intentions in Timor Leste. These findings collectively suggest that both heritage characteristics and accessibility remain critical determinants in shaping youths' motivations and revisit intentions toward cultural heritage destinations.

### 2.3 Revisit Intention

Revisit intention, rooted in Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory of behavioral intention, refers to a tourist's planned decision to return to a destination (Anuar et al., 2021). Khuong and Ha (2014) defined it as the likelihood of revisiting based on prior experiences. Repeat tourists are generally more engaged, stay longer, and promote destinations through positive word-of-mouth (Viet et al., 2020). Youth tourism represents one of the fastest-growing market segments (Preko et al., 2018). However, research on youth revisit intentions within cultural and heritage tourism remains limited (Leelachandra & Biyiri, 2023). Their study in Sri Lanka found that novelty, enjoyment, and cultural engagement were key motivators for youth revisit intentions. The findings emphasize the need for governments and stakeholders to create diverse, engaging, and culturally rich experiences. By highlighting unique traditions, offering educational yet enjoyable activities, and fostering opportunities for relaxation, destinations can enhance revisit intentions among young cultural tourists.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

The conceptual framework illustrates the relationship between push and pull motivational factors and youths' revisit intention to Kelantan's cultural heritage destinations. Push factors, such as rest, relaxation, and knowledge-seeking, represent internal drives that encourage youths to travel, while pull factors, such as heritage characteristics and accessibility, represent external attributes that attract them to a destination. This framework integrates insights from past studies and serves as the foundation for the research objectives and hypotheses of this study. The conceptual framework employed in this study was originally introduced by Dann (1977) through the Tourist Motivation Theory, which emphasizes push and pull factors as key drivers of tourist behavior. Building upon this foundation, the framework has been further revised and adapted by Anuar et al. (2021) to reflect contemporary perspectives in cultural heritage tourism, particularly in relation to youths' revisit intention.

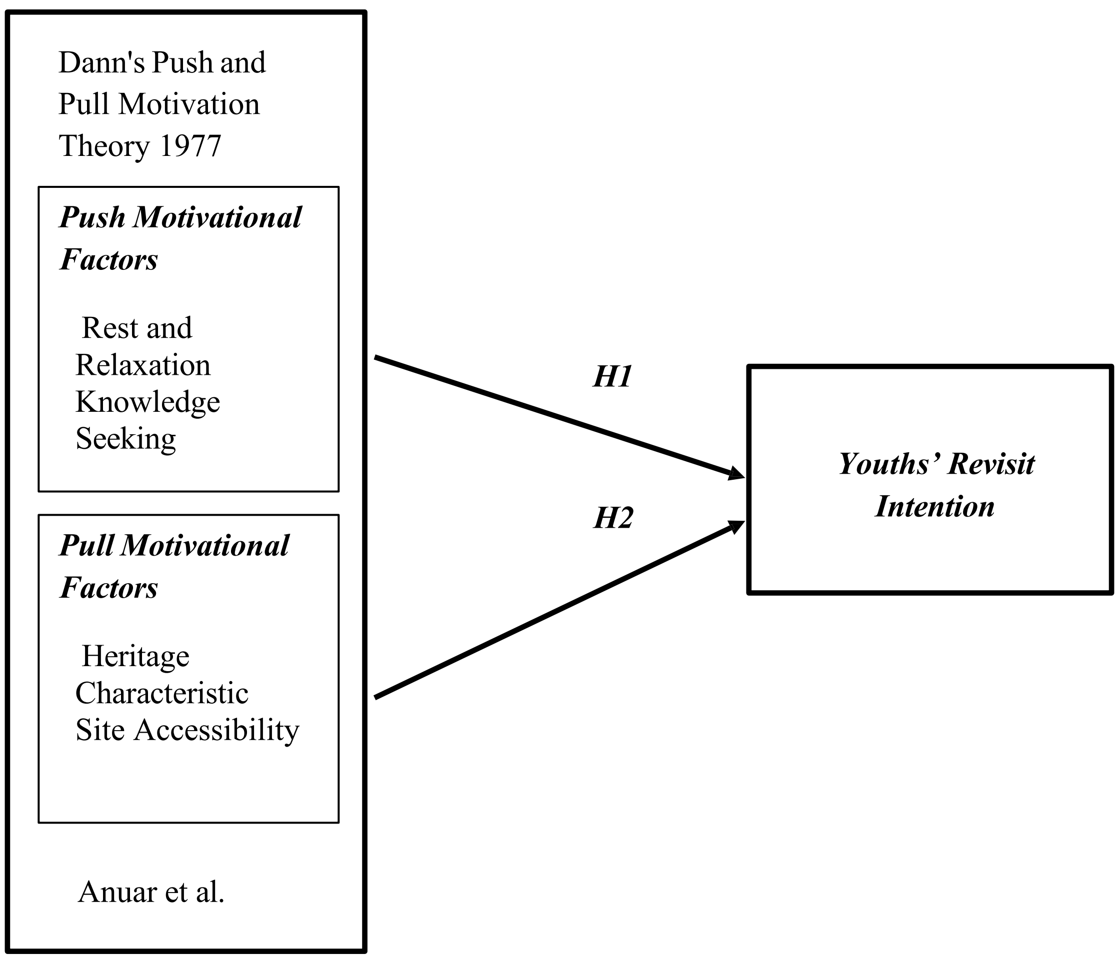


Figure 1. The Conceptual Framework

Having discussed the issue, the main objective of this study is to examine the relationship between motivational factors and youths' passion for cultural experiences in Kelantan. Specifically, the study aims to investigate the influence of push factors, namely rest, relaxation, and knowledge-seeking, on youths' revisit intention to Kelantan's cultural heritage destinations. In addition, it seeks to analyze the role of pull factors, particularly heritage characteristics and site accessibility, in shaping revisit intentions. These objectives collectively provide a structured basis for testing the proposed hypotheses and contribute to a deeper understanding of youth cultural tourism in Kelantan.

This study employs a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional survey to examine the relationship between push and pull motivational factors and youths' revisit intention to Kelantan's cultural heritage destinations. The population targeted consists of domestic youth tourists aged 15–24 years, in line with UNESCO's definition of youth. Based on statistics, this group represents 21.9% of domestic tourists in Malaysia. A purposive sampling method was applied, with a total of 150 respondents, considered sufficient to test the study's variables. The primary research instrument was a structured questionnaire divided into four sections: demographic profile, push factors, pull factors, and revisit intention. Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale. Items were adapted from previous validated studies and pre-tested by three academic experts for clarity and validity. A pilot study involving 75 respondents further ensured the reliability and feasibility of the instrument. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics to summarize respondent characteristics and Pearson correlation to test the relationships among variables. Reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's alpha to assess internal consistency. This methodological framework ensured robust data collection and analysis to achieve the study objectives.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Youth motivations to revisit cultural heritage destinations in Kelantan revealed a spectrum of responses, ranging from those who valued the destinations as places of rest and relaxation to those who engaged primarily with knowledge, history, and cultural authenticity. Some respondents appreciated Kelantan's heritage for its ability to provide a peaceful retreat from daily routines, while others highlighted the richness of crafts, performances, and architecture as their main source of attraction. These dual perspectives suggest that youth cultural tourism in Kelantan operates simultaneously as a restorative and educational experience, with accessibility acting as both an enabler and a limitation. Responses can be broadly categorised into three overlapping typologies. The Leisure Seekers emphasised the restorative qualities of cultural destinations, associating them with relaxation and a slower pace of life. The Knowledge Seekers were motivated by the opportunity to learn about traditions, crafts, and performances, treating their visits as intellectual and cultural enrichment. Meanwhile, the Cultural Enthusiasts engaged most strongly with Kelantan's tangible and intangible heritage, where architecture, food, and festivals formed the essence of their experiences. These categories were not mutually exclusive, but they illustrate the diversity of ways in which youths construct meaning from their encounters with Kelantan's cultural heritage.

For many young visitors, cultural tourism in Kelantan was a form of escape a chance to retreat from academic and social pressures into a setting perceived as calm, authentic, and restorative. Cultural sites were described as providing “peace of mind” and “comfort,” reinforcing earlier findings that relaxation is a powerful motivator for return visits to cultural attractions (Dean & Suhartanto, 2019). This reflects the way cultural environments can serve as therapeutic spaces, where traditional performances, local hospitality, and slower rhythms contrast with the stresses of urban life. Yet, not all respondents perceived cultural destinations in Kelantan as restful. For some, crowded festivals and accessibility challenges created stress rather than relief. This mirrors Duong et al.’s (2023) findings in Vietnam, where rest and relaxation were not universal motivators across all destinations. It suggests that while relaxation is a powerful push factor, it is contingent upon how the site is organised and managed. Poor crowd control, inadequate facilities, or over-commercialisation may dilute the restorative quality that many visitors seek.

A second strong theme was the desire to learn. Many respondents expressed motivation to revisit cultural sites because they provided opportunities to broaden cultural knowledge and connect with traditions not experienced in their daily lives. Visits to *wayang kulit* performances, batik workshops, or heritage museums were framed as both entertaining and intellectually rewarding. This echoes Baptista et al. (2020), who found that curiosity about traditions motivated tourists in Timor-Leste, and Preko et al. (2018), who highlighted the role of knowledge in shaping youth tourism behaviour in Ghana. In Kelantan, youths’ enthusiasm for learning reflects a broader interest in cultural identity and continuity. Many respondents, especially those from outside Kelantan, may perceive these destinations as educational opportunities to experience Malay traditions that are increasingly rare in urban settings. Moreover, the significance of knowledge seeking resonates with UNESCO’s emphasis on intangible cultural heritage, where knowledge transmission occurs through practice and lived experience rather than abstract information. For youth tourists, knowledge is not just an academic exercise but a way of building identity and cultural connection.

While push factors such as relaxation and knowledge were significant, the most decisive influence on revisit intention was the pull of Kelantan’s cultural heritage itself. Traditional crafts, historic architecture, local cuisine, and performing arts were consistently highlighted as the strongest attractions. Respondents often expressed pride in Kelantan’s role as the “cradle of Malay culture,” and many indicated a desire to return specifically to experience festivals, markets, and performances again. This finding aligns with research showing that heritage attributes strongly predict revisit intention among younger tourists (Anuar et al., 2023; Danez et al., 2023). It also resonates with the notion of authenticity in tourism (Wang, 1999), where the perceived genuineness of cultural expressions enhances satisfaction and loyalty. For Kelantan, the preservation of art forms such as *mak yong* or *wayang kulit* is not only a matter of cultural safeguarding but also a key driver of tourism sustainability. Yet, authenticity is also fragile. Some respondents noted that over-commercialisation, such as excessive souvenir selling or overtly modern facilities, reduced their sense of heritage value. This reflects debates in the literature (Shackley, 2010; Collins-Kreiner, 2018) on how commodification can undermine the cultural meaning of heritage experiences. For youth tourists, the challenge lies in balancing accessibility with preservation: too much modernisation risks eroding the very qualities that make heritage sites appealing.

Accessibility, meanwhile, emerged as a significant but secondary factor. Respondents valued destinations that were easy to reach, affordable, and equipped with basic facilities such as transport, internet connectivity, and inclusive amenities for families. This aligns with studies highlighting the importance of accessibility for Generation Z travellers (Danez et al., 2023). For student travellers with limited budgets, practical considerations like transport costs often determined whether they could revisit. However, accessibility was not perceived as inspiring in itself. Unlike heritage or relaxation, it did not create emotional attachment. Rather, it functioned as an enabler: necessary for visits to occur, but insufficient to generate loyalty. This reflects Mwawaza et al.'s (2022) findings in Kenya, where accessibility mattered less than the cultural or natural appeal of the site. In Kelantan, poor accessibility risks excluding youth travellers, but excellent accessibility alone cannot secure repeat visitation without strong heritage content.

Taken together, the findings illustrate that revisit intention among youths is multi-dimensional. Rest and relaxation and knowledge seeking represent internal desires, while heritage and accessibility represent external attributes. Youths travel to cultural sites not merely to "see" but to experience, like resting, learning, engaging, and reconnecting with identity. The results echo Dann's (1977) push–pull model but also suggest that heritage characteristics act as the linchpin, bridging internal desires with external offerings. A youth motivated by relaxation may choose Kelantan because its cultural sites embody calm; a youth motivated by knowledge may revisit because heritage experiences offer continuous learning opportunities. In this sense, push factors explain the internal factors like relaxation and achievement, while pull factors determine the external factors such as architecture and what makes the destination stand out.

From a management perspective, these results underline the need to balance authenticity, education, and accessibility. Efforts to promote cultural tourism in Kelantan should go beyond simple marketing of heritage assets. Instead, managers should consider how sites can be curated to meet multiple motivational needs. For Leisure Seekers, emphasising the calming aspects of cultural tourism, through landscape design, crowd management, and ambience, will strengthen the relaxation appeal.

For Knowledge Seekers, interactive interpretation strategies such as storytelling, workshops, and guided tours can deepen engagement and build loyalty. For Cultural Enthusiasts, safeguarding authenticity through preservation of performances, crafts, and cuisine is essential, while avoiding over-commercialisation. Tourism boards and travel agents could also segment their marketing according to these motivational typologies, tailoring packages that highlight relaxation, learning, or cultural immersion. This would ensure a broader appeal to diverse youth segments while sustaining cultural authenticity.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study explored the push and pull motivations influencing Malaysian youths' revisit intentions to cultural heritage destinations in Kelantan, focusing on rest and relaxation, knowledge seeking, heritage characteristics, and site accessibility. The findings revealed that all four dimensions were significantly correlated with revisit intention, though their influence varied. Push factors such as rest and relaxation and knowledge seeking highlight the internal drivers that prompt youths to travel, reflecting the desire for both psychological restoration and intellectual engagement. Pull factors, meanwhile, emphasize external attributes that shape destination choice, with heritage characteristics emerging as the most powerful predictor of revisit intention. This underscores the centrality of cultural authenticity through crafts, performances, cuisine, and architecture in sustaining youth engagement with heritage tourism. The results suggest that youth motivations are multi-dimensional, combining emotional, intellectual, and practical considerations. Relaxation reflects the therapeutic role of cultural sites, where young people escape from daily stressors. Knowledge seeking points to the educational and identity-building value of heritage tourism, as youths use their visits to reconnect with cultural roots and broaden their horizons. Heritage characteristics represent the essence of cultural tourism, providing the authenticity that anchors positive experiences and loyalty. Accessibility, though less influential, functions as a critical enabler that facilitates participation, especially for students with limited budgets. Collectively, these factors illustrate that revisit intention is not determined by one single motivator but by the interplay between internal desires and external offerings.

Theoretically, this study reinforces the value of the push–pull model in explaining revisit intention while also illustrating its flexibility. The findings show that push factors do not operate in isolation but are realised through the medium of pull attributes. The desire for rest is only meaningful when the site offers a calming ambience, while the quest for knowledge becomes fulfilling through tangible heritage experiences. This suggests that push and pull motivations should not be treated as separate categories but as interdependent dynamics. Furthermore, the study highlights the significance of authenticity in youth cultural tourism, contributing to ongoing debates about the role of staged versus genuine experiences. For youths in Kelantan, authenticity remains a decisive factor, reflecting broader generational concerns with cultural integrity and heritage preservation.

From a practical perspective, the findings provide several directions for policymakers, destination managers, and tourism practitioners. Preserving and promoting heritage authenticity emerges as a key priority. Investments should focus on safeguarding traditional arts such as *wayang kulit, mak yong*, and *batik*, not only as cultural assets but also as core drivers of youth revisit intention. Efforts should resist excessive commodification, as over-commercialization risks eroding the authenticity that young visitors value most. At the same time, managers should design youth-friendly educational experiences. Interactive activities such as heritage workshops, storytelling sessions, and guided tours can strengthen the knowledge-seeking motivation while creating memorable experiences that encourage loyalty. Accessibility should also be improved to ensure inclusivity. Affordable transport options, digital connectivity, and universal facilities for different age and ability groups can widen participation. While accessibility alone may not guarantee revisit intention, it remains essential to ensuring equity and participation. Finally, marketing strategies should be tailored to different motivational typologies. Campaigns that highlight the restorative quality of cultural destinations can appeal to those seeking leisure, while promotions focusing on workshops and cultural narratives may attract knowledge-oriented visitors. Cultural enthusiasts, meanwhile, may respond best to messaging that emphasises authenticity and pride in heritage.

Collectively, these implications highlight the need for an integrated approach to cultural heritage tourism in Kelantan. Rather than focusing narrowly on either heritage conservation or tourism development, managers should adopt a balanced strategy that protects authenticity while ensuring youth engagement and accessibility. Doing so will not only enhance revisit intention but also contribute to the sustainability of cultural tourism as a whole. Despite its contributions, the study is not without limitations. The reliance on a cross-sectional survey design limits the ability to establish causality. While significant correlations were found between motivations and revisit intention, it cannot be concluded with certainty that motivations directly cause revisits. Longitudinal studies tracking tourist behaviour over time would provide stronger evidence of causal relationships. The sample was also dominated by students, who may not represent the broader youth population. As students often have limited disposable income, their motivations and revisit intentions may differ from working youths or those from higher-income brackets. This sampling bias restricts the generalisability of the findings to all

Malaysian youths. Furthermore, the study focused only on Kelantan as a case study, which limits the ability to generalise findings across Malaysia or other cultural contexts. Different states may present different heritage attributes, accessibility challenges, and youth perceptions. Finally, the quantitative methodology provided breadth but limited depth. While statistical correlations illustrate general patterns, they cannot capture the nuanced meanings and emotional dimensions of youth experiences. Qualitative approaches, such as interviews or ethnographic observation, could add richness to the interpretation.

Building on these limitations, several avenues for future research can be identified. Longitudinal designs could examine how youth motivations and revisit intentions evolve over time, providing a more dynamic understanding of repeat visits. Expanding the demographic scope to include working youths, higher-income groups, or international visitors would provide a more comprehensive picture of youth cultural tourism and reveal whether motivations differ by socio-economic status or cultural background. Future research should also explore other cultural destinations beyond Kelantan, both within Malaysia and across Southeast Asia. Comparative studies could reveal similarities and differences in youth motivations, contributing to regional tourism strategies. Incorporating qualitative approaches would enrich the understanding of youth experiences, allowing researchers to capture how young travellers articulate notions of authenticity, relaxation, and knowledge in their own words. Finally, research should examine the role of digital technology in shaping youth engagement with cultural heritage. With increasing reliance on social media, virtual tours, and digital storytelling, youths' experiences and revisit intentions may be influenced as much by online representations of heritage sites as by the sites themselves. Understanding how digital platforms mediate cultural tourism could provide innovative strategies for engaging younger generations.

Overall, this study highlights the complexity of youth motivations for revisiting cultural heritage destinations in Kelantan. By identifying the interplay between rest, knowledge, authenticity, and accessibility, the research offers valuable insights for both theory and practice. The findings remind us that cultural heritage tourism is not solely about preserving the past but also about creating meaningful, authentic, and inclusive experiences for the present and future. Addressing these motivations holistically will ensure that cultural tourism remains relevant to younger generations while sustaining the heritage that defines Kelantan's identity.

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ARTICLE

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# Community Willingness and Readiness for Cultural Heritage Tourism: The Case of Kampung Chitty, Malacca Historic City, Malaysia

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## ABSTRACT

Cultural heritage tourism (CHT) engages communities by preserving and showcasing traditions, identities, and practices. Cultural heritage tourism involves traveling to explore places, artifacts, and activities that reflect a region's historical narratives and identity. It encourages local communities to engage by sharing their heritage and traditions. However, successful cultural heritage tourism depends on the willingness and readiness of the local community to participate. Despite its significance in sustainable tourism planning and heritage preservation, research on local community participation remains limited. This study investigates the willingness, readiness, and involvement of Kampung Chitty residents in Malacca's heritage tourism. Using a qualitative approach, five semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore community perceptions. Findings reveal that willingness is shaped by economic benefits, cultural attachment, sustainability awareness, and social networks, while readiness depends on knowledge, skills, resources, and commitment. Despite strong motivation and cultural pride, barriers such as limited infrastructure, generational disengagement, and insufficient training hinder full participation. This study contributes to the literature by highlighting the dual role of economic incentives and cultural authenticity in motivating participation, offering practical insights for policymakers and tourism planners to foster inclusive and sustainable cultural heritage tourism.

**Keywords**: Cultural Heritage Tourism; Community Participation; Kampung Chitty Readiness; Willingness

Article Classification: Case Study

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Cultural Heritage Tourism (CHT) has emerged as a vital dimension of the global tourism industry, offering travelers opportunities to engage with the tangible and intangible cultural elements of destinations. Defined as travel undertaken to explore places, artifacts, and activities that authentically reflect a community's historical narratives and cultural identity, CHT not only preserves heritage but also stimulates socio-economic development and intercultural understanding (Gordon, 2022; Mazi & Choy, 2021). The World Tourism Organization has projected that cultural tourism will remain among the fastest-growing segments of the tourism sector; yet, balancing its economic potential with sustainable cultural preservation remains a persistent challenge (Ismail et al., 2014). When well-managed, CHT revitalizes traditions, restores heritage sites, and provides income opportunities. However, when neglected, it risks cultural commodification and the erosion of authenticity (Mahboob et al., 2022).

Within this global context, Malaysia has emerged as a notable cultural heritage destination, where the integration of tourism development and heritage preservation presents both opportunities and challenges. Malaysia has positioned itself as a cultural heritage hub within Southeast Asia, with Malacca recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2008. The state is historically significant for its strategic role as a maritime trading port for over 500 years, facilitating exchanges among Malay, Indian, Chinese, Portuguese, Dutch, and British cultures. Malacca's diverse heritage is showcased through iconic landmarks such as the Stadthuys, St. Paul's Church, and Christ Church, alongside living traditions that remain embedded in local communities (Ismail et al., 2018). Within this landscape lies *Kampung Chitty*, a small but culturally distinctive village, home to the Chitty community, descendants of Indian traders intermarried with local Malays, Chinese, and Javanese during the Malacca Sultanate (Moorthy, 2021). Officially recognized as a historic village in 2002, Kampung Chitty preserves a unique blend of traditions, combining Hindu religious practices with Malay language, cuisine, and customs. Yet, like many small cultural enclaves, it faces existential challenges, including modernization, outmigration of youth, and weakening intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge (Fikri et al., 2021).

The sustainability of CHT relies heavily on the active participation of local communities, whose involvement ensures that tourism initiatives align with cultural authenticity and community aspirations (Rasoolimanesh & Jaafar, 2016; Arumugam et al., 2023). Local communities not only act as custodians of heritage but also play a pivotal role in shaping tourist experiences. However, despite the significance of their role, small heritage communities like Kampung Chitty often face marginalization in tourism planning compared to larger or more commercialized heritage sites (Ismail et al., 2018). Limited resources, lack of systematic documentation, insufficient training, and generational disengagement restrict their ability to leverage tourism for cultural and economic sustainability (Khadijah et al., 2024).

Although several studies have examined CHT in Malaysia and beyond, limited attention has been given to understanding the *willingness* and *readiness* of small, marginalized heritage communities to participate in tourism development (Sayuti, 2023;

Hanifah et al., 2024). This gap is critical because willingness reflects a community's motivation to engage in tourism initiatives, while readiness determines their capacity, in terms of knowledge, skills, resources, and commitment, to effectively participate (Edwards et al., 2000). Without willingness, even resource-rich communities may resist tourism activities; conversely, without readiness, motivated communities may fail to sustain engagement. Understanding both dimensions is therefore essential for fostering sustainable and inclusive tourism.

To address this gap, this study investigates the case of Kampung Chitty in Malacca. Specifically, it explores (1) the current levels of community involvement in CHT, (2) the factors influencing their willingness to participate, and (3) the extent of their readiness in terms of skills, knowledge, resources, and commitment. By focusing on Kampung Chitty, this research contributes not only to Malaysian tourism studies but also to broader discussions on community-based heritage tourism in small, hybrid cultural communities. The findings aim to guide policymakers, NGOs, and tourism planners in designing culturally sensitive and inclusive strategies that preserve heritage while empowering local communities.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Cultural Heritage Tourism

CHT is widely acknowledged as one of the fastest-growing segments of global tourism, contributing significantly to both cultural preservation and socio-economic development (Gordon, 2022, Wallerstein, 2022). It encompasses both tangible heritage, such as monuments, architecture, and landscapes, and intangible heritage, including traditions, rituals, crafts, and oral histories (UNESCO, 2003; Zarandona, 2015). Importantly, CHT functions as a bridge between past and present, allowing communities to maintain cultural continuity while adapting to modern tourism demands (Vos, 2018).

International examples illustrate the transformative potential of CHT. In China, the designation of the Fujian *tulou* as a World Heritage Site revitalized local economies but also highlighted the need to balance conservation with commercialization pressures (Liu et al., 2022). Similarly, projects in Algeria's Dellys and Vietnam's Tuyên Quang demonstrated that heritage-based tourism can stimulate community development, though challenges remain in coordination and community empowerment (Necissa & Rayane, 2024; Van, 2024). While the Fujian tulou shows successful community engagement, experiences in Dellys indicate that without inclusive governance, benefits may be unevenly distributed, emphasizing the importance of participatory approaches in CHT. Within Malaysia, CHT initiatives such as the Langkawi charcoal kilns and traditional kite-making (*Wau Bulan*) illustrate how local culture can be preserved while generating tourism value (Lim et al., 2023; Kasinathan, 2024).

Nevertheless, concerns of cultural commodification and loss of authenticity persist when tourism is driven by top-down policies without community participation (Mahboob et al., 2022). Authenticity has emerged as a key determinant of visitor satisfaction and revisit intention, making it essential that cultural tourism strategies prioritize local voices and values (Uslu et al., 2023; Zhou et al., 2022). These examples demonstrate how CHT intersects with key theoretical concepts of authenticity, community participation, and heritage conservation. For small heritage communities such as Kampung Chitty, this underscores the need for participatory approaches that safeguard unique traditions while accommodating tourism development.

**2.2 Community Participation**

Community participation is a cornerstone of sustainable CHT because it ensures that local perspectives, aspirations, and cultural priorities shape tourism development (Migliaro, 2023; Rasmussen, 2023). Participation empowers communities to act not merely as service providers but as decision-makers and custodians of their heritage. Arnstein's (1969) *Ladder of Citizen Participation* remains an influential framework, categorizing participation from manipulative and tokenistic involvement to genuine citizen power. At the lowest level, participation may be symbolic, with little influence on decision-making. In the middle tier, residents can express opinions but lack authority to influence outcomes, akin to induced participation in Tosun's (2006) model. At the highest level, communities hold genuine power to initiate, plan, and manage tourism projects, aligning with spontaneous participation and self-mobilisation frameworks. Evidence from various contexts demonstrates the benefits of meaningful participation. For example, integrating indigenous knowledge into tourism projects in Vietnam has improved cultural preservation and strengthened community ownership (Nam & Thanh, 2024). Similarly, rehabilitation of the Sawentar Temple in Indonesia highlighted how grassroots participation fosters collective identity (Aji & Wirasanti, 2024). Conversely, limited digital access in West Java underscores structural barriers that restrict meaningful engagement (Khadijah et al., 2024).

Meaningful participation is not only about consultation but also about decision-making power. When communities have greater control, they are more likely to support tourism initiatives and contribute to their sustainability (Basile-Mario et al., 2021). In Kampung Chitty, however, participation has often been limited to operational roles such as preparing food or hosting visitors, with minimal involvement in higher-level planning. This imbalance raises concerns of marginalization, which could undermine long-term sustainability if not addressed (Mubita et al., 2017).

**2.3 Willingness to Participate**

Willingness reflects the motivational dimension of community engagement in Cultural Heritage Tourism (CHT), encompassing the readiness, motivation, and enthusiasm of local communities to participate in heritage preservation and tourism activities. Multiple studies indicate that willingness is shaped by economic, cultural, social, and environmental factors (Chauhan, 2022; Eslami et al., 2019), but the relative influence of these factors varies across contexts.

Economic benefits remain a powerful incentive, as tourism generates employment opportunities, diversifies income sources, and enhances resilience (Huong et al., 2021; Megeirhi et al., 2020). Opportunities for small business ventures, handicraft sales, or local guiding services provide tangible income and a sense of ownership over tourism outcomes, but these temporary gains may not sustain engagement without complementary cultural and social incentives.

Community attachment is equally critical, as strong emotional ties to place motivate residents to participate in heritage activities that protect identity and collective memory (Chauhan, 2022; Dragouni et al., 2017). Communities with strong connections to their cultural practices are often more inclined to engage in tourism initiatives that safeguard local heritage, whereas those facing rapid socio-economic changes may prioritize immediate financial gains.

Cultural and social values further reinforce willingness when communities perceive tourism as a mechanism to safeguard traditions, with alignment between tourism development and cultural integrity ensuring acceptance and pride (Eslami et al., 2019). Sustainability awareness is a growing driver of participation, particularly among younger generations conscious of environmental impacts. Residents who perceive tourism as contributing to ecological and cultural sustainability are more likely to participate actively in planning and management (Huong et al., 2021).

Social networks and norms enhance participation by fostering collective action, trust, and intergenerational support (Huong et al., 2021; Megeirhi et al., 2020). The influence of social ties is often context-dependent; in close-knit communities, peer influence, family expectations, and community leaders can amplify willingness, whereas in more fragmented settings, networks may be weaker, limiting participation.

For Kampung Chitty, willingness is intricately tied not only to financial incentives but also to cultural pride in maintaining hybrid traditions, blending Chitty heritage with broader Malaysian cultural influences. This local context underscores that policy approaches must go beyond economic benefits to embrace identity-driven motivations, integrating social cohesion, cultural preservation, and sustainable practices.

**2.4 Readiness to Participate**

While willingness indicates motivation, readiness refers to the capacity to translate motivation into action. The *Community Readiness Model* (CRM) conceptualizes readiness as comprising knowledge, skills, resources, and commitment (Edwards et al., 2000). Ayu (2014) further emphasizes the importance of procedural knowledge, marketing skills, and resource mobilization in determining preparedness for tourism development. Knowledge enables communities to understand visitor behavior and tourism markets, skills facilitate management and implementation, and resources, both natural and built, provide the foundation for activities. Commitment, reflected in collective action and long-term planning, sustains initiatives over time.

Case studies across the globe highlight the varied manifestations of readiness depending on local capacities and contexts. In Northern Thailand, indigenous knowledge integration enhanced ecotourism management (Promburom et al., 2009) whereas in Ethiopia, resource management proved vital for leveraging cultural assets (Tadesse, 2022). Conversely, in Tanzania and Oman, deficiencies in infrastructure and training hindered local participation (Sayuti, 2023). Similarly in Indonesia and Vietnam, studies found that while cultural knowledge was strong, financial and skill-related gaps limited effective participation (Thảo et al., 2024; Kurniati et al., 2024). These contrasts illustrate that cultural knowledge alone does not guarantee readiness; rather, a combination of skills, resources, and institutional support is necessary to convert willingness into tangible outcomes.

For Kampung Chitty, readiness challenges are particularly evident in terms of infrastructure, youth engagement, and capacity-building. While elders possess cultural knowledge and skills in storytelling, rituals, and traditional cooking, younger generations are less engaged due to migration and modernization pressures. This imbalance threatens the continuity of cultural practices unless training and mentorship initiatives are prioritized.

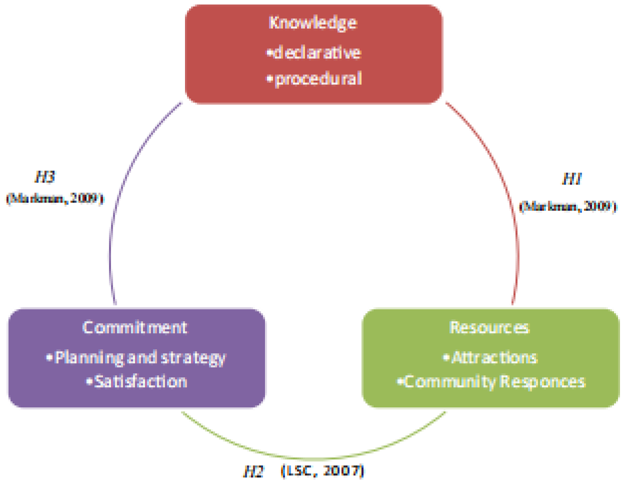


Figure 2.4. Sustainable Tourism Readiness Framework

*Source: Ayu, R. (2014)*

**2.5 Framework of the Study**

Drawing from the reviewed literature, this study develops a framework that integrates involvement, willingness, and readiness as interdependent dimensions of community participation in CHT. The framework is situated (refer to Figure 2.5). Involvement is understood through the lenses of Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Citizen Participation and Tosun's (2006) typology, capturing the extent to which communities move from tokenistic or consultative roles to active decision-making and project management. Willingness is shaped by a combination of economic, cultural, social, and sustainability-related factors, reflecting both tangible incentives and identity-driven motivations that encourage engagement in heritage preservation and tourism activities (Chauhan, 2022; Dragouni et al., 2017; Eslami et al., 2019; Huong et al., 2021). Readiness, in turn, depends on the availability of resources, knowledge, skills, and collective commitment, determining whether motivated communities can translate interest into effective participation (Ayu, 2014; Edwards et al., 2000).

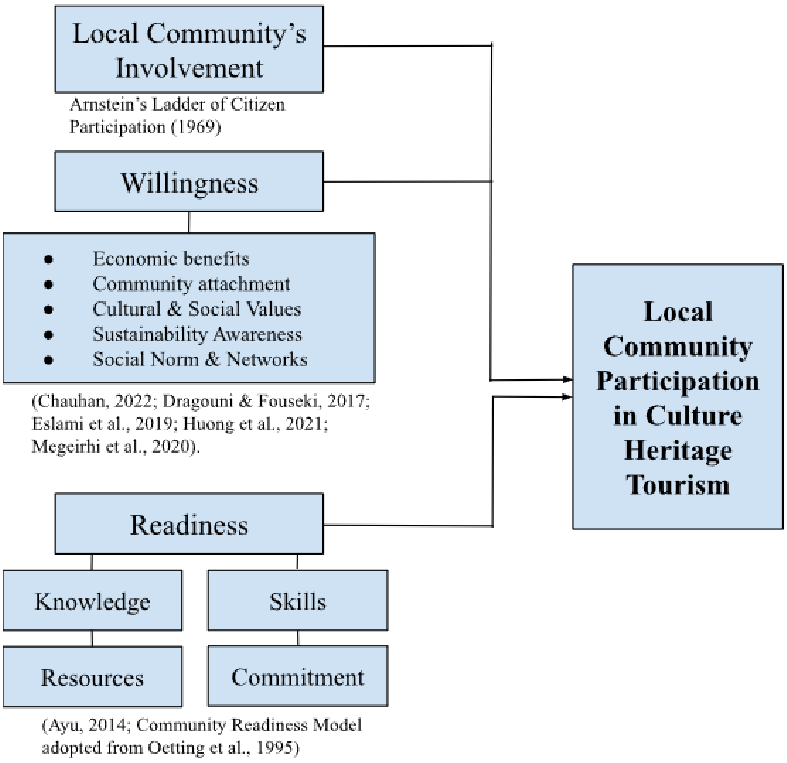


Figure 2.5. Framework of Study

*Source: Understanding Local Community's Willingness and Readiness to Participate in Cultural Heritage Tourism in Kampung Chetti, Malacca, World Heritage Sites (2025)*

By combining these perspectives, the framework offers a holistic lens for assessing how small heritage communities, such as Kampung Chitty, can sustain cultural tourism. This integrative approach contributes both theoretically, by extending participation models to marginalized communities, and practically, by offering insights for inclusive and sustainable policy design.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design, which is particularly suited for exploring perceptions, attitudes, and lived experiences of local communities. Unlike quantitative surveys that emphasize breadth, qualitative approaches allow for in-depth exploration of complex social realities, capturing nuances of cultural practices and motivations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ontologically, this study assumes a constructivist perspective, acknowledging that realities are socially constructed through interactions and cultural contexts. Epistemologically, knowledge is co-created between the researcher and participants, emphasizing interpretive understanding rather than objective measurement. Since the objective of this research was to investigate the willingness, readiness, and involvement of the Kampung Chitty community in cultural heritage tourism (CHT), a qualitative design ensured a contextualized understanding of cultural identity and participation.

Within the qualitative design, a case study approach was employed, focusing on Kampung Chitty as a single bounded unit. A case study facilitates a holistic understanding of phenomena within their real-life context. This approach was appropriate because Kampung Chitty represents a unique cultural heritage setting where willingness, readiness, and involvement in cultural heritage tourism (CHT) are shaped by historical, social, and cultural dynamics. Studying this community as a single case allowed the research to capture the depth and complexity of local experiences, motivations, and challenges.

**3.2 Study Area**

The research was conducted in *Kampung Chitty*, a small heritage village located in Gajah Berang, Malacca, Malaysia. The community, consisting of approximately 350 residents, is historically significant due to its hybrid cultural identity blending Hindu practices with Malay social customs (Moorthy, 2021). Kampung Chitty was chosen as the study site because of its unique cultural heritage, recognition as a historic village since 2002, and its potential as an underrepresented cultural tourism destination within Malacca's UNESCO World Heritage framework. However, modernization and youth migration have threatened the continuity of traditions, making it an appropriate case study for examining readiness and willingness in CHT.

**3.3 Sampling Strategy**

A purposive sampling approach was employed to identify participants who possessed relevant knowledge and experiences regarding the community's cultural heritage and tourism activities. Five community members were selected to represent different perspectives, including elders, festival organizers, and residents with tourism-related experiences. While the sample size may appear small, it is consistent with qualitative research principles, which prioritize *depth of insights* over *breadth of coverage* (Guest et al., 2006). The selected participants were able to provide *rich, contextual narratives* on the community's involvement in cultural practices and tourism-related activities.

The inclusion criteria for selecting participants were: (i) they must be residents of Kampung Chitty, (ii) have active involvement or familiarity with cultural heritage practices, and (iii) be willing to share experiences related to tourism and community activities. Initial contacts were made with the assistance of community leaders, after which referrals were used to identify additional participants to ensure diverse perspectives. Data saturation was reached by the fifth interview, as no new themes emerged during the final sessions (Guest et al., 2006).

Table 1 summarizes the demographic background and community roles of the five respondents. This reflects the generational and functional diversity of the sample, ensuring that perspectives were captured from both cultural custodians and community representatives involved in tourism-related activities.

Table 1. Demographic background and community roles

| No. of Respondents | Age | Gender | Occupation |
|---|---|---|---|
| R1 | 75 | Male | Retiree |
| R2 | 55 | Male | Retiree |
| R3 | 57 | Male | Malacca Indian Association's committee members |
| R4 | 79 | Male | Head Villager |
| R5 | 48 | Male | Sanctuary's gatekeeper |

### 3.4 Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which allowed for a balance between structured questions and open-ended responses. This approach encouraged participants to share detailed narratives while enabling the researcher to probe for further insights when necessary (Kallio et al., 2016). Interviews were conducted face-to-face at the participants' homes or community gathering spaces, depending on their convenience. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with the consent of the participants. To ensure ethical integrity, respondents were informed of the study's purpose and assured of confidentiality.

The interview guide focused on three thematic areas aligned with the research objectives: (1) Current involvement in cultural heritage activities, (2) Willingness to participate in cultural heritage tourism (e.g., perceived benefits, cultural and social motivations, sustainability awareness), and (3) Readiness to participate, including knowledge, skills, resources, and commitment.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis, a widely utilized approach in qualitative research for identifying and interpreting patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis process followed several iterative stages, beginning with familiarization, where the transcripts were read multiple times to gain a deep understanding of the content. This was followed by initial coding, in which relevant excerpts related to willingness, readiness, and involvement were identified. Subsequently, the coded data were organized into broader categories or themes, such as economic benefits, community attachment, cultural preservation, skills, and resources. These themes were then reviewed and refined to ensure consistency and alignment with the research objectives. Finally, the findings were interpreted and contextualized within the theoretical framework and existing literature to provide meaningful insights into the study's focus. Triangulation was achieved by collecting perspectives from diverse participants, including elders, festival organizers, and residents with tourism experience, ensuring insights were not limited to a single viewpoint. Iterative comparison of emerging themes with prior studies strengthened the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. By combining different participant perspectives and cross-referencing literature, the study enhanced the validity and reliability of the findings.

### 3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was sought in line with the research protocols of higher learning institutions. Participants were briefed about the voluntary nature of their participation, and informed consent was obtained before each interview. Anonymity was ensured by coding participants as Respondent 1 through Respondent 5, and data were handled confidentially throughout the research process.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents findings from semi-structured interviews with five residents of Kampung Chitty residents. Thematic analysis revealed three main dimensions of community participation in cultural heritage tourism (CHT): (1) current involvement, (2) willingness to participate, and (3) readiness to participate. Each dimension is discussed below, illustrated with participants' verbatim quotes to reflect lived experiences.

### 4.1 Current Community Involvement

The degree of involvement in CHT among Kampung Chitty residents varies from active engagement to occasional participation. Four out of five respondents reported regular involvement in cultural events such as *Ponggal*, exhibitions, and heritage festivals, performing roles that include cooking traditional foods, guiding visitors, and performing ceremonial duties. For example, one participant shared:

*"I once cooked for an event at the red building, involving the Chitty culture in the ceremony. The government or my YB friends will call me to promote Kampung Chitty"* (Respondent 2).

Another highlighted his role as a cultural guide:

*"… I often take tourists to visit the area and promote Chitty culture through festivals like Ponggal"* (Respondent 4).

However, not all residents are equally active. One respondent admitted to only occasional involvement in national events:

*"I rarely get involved. Sometimes I take part in parades like the National Day Parade"* (Respondent 1).

These findings indicate that while cultural pride remains strong among elders, broader community participation is inconsistent, particularly among younger generations, is less consistent. This indicates potential for more inclusive strategies to strengthen overall participation in heritage activities.

### 4.2 Factors Influencing Willingness to Participate

The interviews highlighted several interrelated factors influencing the willingness of Kampung Chitty residents to engage in CHT.

**Economic Benefits**

Tourism is seen as a potential source of supplementary income, with residents emphasizing opportunities for small businesses during festivals. As one respondent explained:
*"In 2 days of the program, they distributed between RM1,000 to RM2,000… If there are a lot of tourists, the residents here can sell traditional food, medicine, or be a tour guide"* (Respondent 3).

Concerns about rising costs due to increased tourism were also noted: *"Sometimes the price of goods goes up because there are many tourists come."*

These insights suggest that while economic incentives encourage engagement, the impact is situational and may require careful planning to sustain participation.

**Community Attachment**

Residents expressed generational ties to Kampung Chitty, reinforcing their desire to preserve cultural identity. One respondent shared:
*"I was born in this house. My grandmother came here and married a local. I am 3rd generation. Very attached, I was born and raised here… I still practice all that"* (Respondent 5).

Such intergenerational connections foster a sense of stewardship, motivating participation beyond material gains.

**Cultural and Social Values**

Authenticity in cultural practices was emphasized as a non-negotiable aspect of heritage tourism. Traditional cuisine was repeatedly highlighted:
*"If tourists come like my friend from Singapore… he will call me and say 'I want to ask uncle to cook Chitty cultural food.' No need to change. We can adjust it a little bit, but the recipe has to stay original"* (Respondent 2).

This underscores the role of cultural authenticity in maintaining both community pride and visitor satisfaction.

**Sustainability Awareness**

Some respondents expressed concerns about tourism's impact on traditions and the environment. One commented:

*“Tourism is good, but tourists should not pollute the village or disturb our customs”* (Respondent 3).

Another stressed the importance of intergenerational transmission:
*“During Ponggal, the community teaches the younger generation to cook milk rice using firewood.”* (Respondent 4)

This reflects growing awareness of eco-cultural sustainability as part of heritage preservation.

**Social Networks and Norms**
Participation was often reinforced by family and community traditions passed down through generations. For example:
*“…when my grandmother makes it, my mother will help. Then when my mother makes it, I will help. Now I ask my children to help too”* (Respondent 5).

This highlights the collective nature of participation, where social expectations strengthen community involvement**.**

**4.3 Readiness to Participate: Skills, Knowledge, Resources, and Commitment**
Readiness reflects the community’s capacity to translate motivation into action, encompassing knowledge, skills, resources, and commitment.

**Knowledge**
Most respondents displayed strong knowledge of cultural traditions and history. One participant noted:
*“Our culture remains… We go outside to showcase our culture. Multiple times, people have called me to go to Singapore”* (Respondent 2).

However, gaps were acknowledged, with some expressing the need for training programs to expand their knowledge about tourism management.

**Skills**
Respondents highlighted skills in storytelling, cooking, and communication, all of which are crucial for engaging tourists:
*“The skill of telling stories about the history of the village, cooking traditional food… all this is important to attract tourists.”* (Respondent 4),

Yet, a need for improved communication skills, particularly for interacting with international visitors, was frequently mentioned.

**Resources**

The community possesses unique cultural assets, including temples, rituals, and cuisine. However, infrastructural gaps were evident:

*"…the main road and the temple are already there, but there is still a lack of signs, public toilets, and rest areas for tourists"* (Respondent 1).

Limited external support and inadequate facilities were identified as barriers to readiness.

**Commitment**

Elders demonstrated strong commitment to cultural preservation, often voicing concerns about youth disengagement:

*"If we don't keep it, it will disappear… now the new generation all go to college."* (Respondent 3)

Nevertheless, efforts are being made to involve youth through hands-on experiences, as illustrated by one respondent:

*"We have to involve them from the beginning. When they enjoy, they will continue."* (Respondent 5)

**4.4 Summary of Findings**

Table 2 below indicate the summarizes of the themes, sub-themes, and overall findings on involvement, willingness, and readiness.

Table 2. Summarized Analysis of Findings for Level of Involvement, Willingness, and Readiness

| **Theme** | **Subtheme** | **Overall Findings** |
|---|---|---|
| **Level of Involvement** | Participation | • Involvement varies; some are highly engaged, while others participate occasionally, suggesting opportunities for broader participation |
| **Willingness to Participate** | Economic Benefits | • Expecting financial benefits such as employment and high income |
| | Community Attachment | • Had a strong emotional connection with the community<br>• Strong sense of responsibility to support tourism development |
| | Social and Cultural Value | • Emphasized preserving Chitty's authenticity<br>• Traditional cuisine plays a central role in |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | Chitty's CHT activities<br>• Minor adjustments are acceptable, but keep the originality |
| | Sustainability Awareness | • Understanding of the environmental impacts<br>• The needs of eco-friendly tourism practices to increase participation<br>• Emphasized on young generation's responsibility for cultural continuity |
| | Social Networks and Norms | • Mostly influenced by family through being passed down from one generation to another generation |
| **Readiness to Participate** | Knowledge | • Understand the concept of CHT and be knowledgeable about Chitty's culture<br>• Cultural erosion is the main concern<br>• Prioritizing preservation of legacy |
| | Skills | • Expert in practical skills such as traditional cooking, storytelling, and participating in tourism activities<br>• The need to improve communication skills to interact with tourists<br>• Training program for an in-depth understanding of tourism |
| | Resources | • Abundance of unique cultural assets<br>• Lack of public facilities such as signage, restrooms to entertain tourists |
| | Commitment | • Showed strong commitment to protecting Chitty's cultural heritage<br>• Elder communities are more dedicated compared to younger generations<br>• Emphasized motivating youngsters by practical involvement and hands-on experiences |

*Source: Understanding Local Community's Willingness and Readiness to Participate in Cultural Heritage Tourism in Kampung Chitty, Malacca, World Heritage Sites (2025)*

## 5. DISCUSSION

This study examined the involvement, willingness, and readiness of the Kampung Chitty community to participate in CHT. The findings confirm that economic benefits, cultural pride, and social networks strongly influence willingness, while knowledge, skills, resources, and commitment determine readiness. Despite strong cultural identity and motivation, challenges such as limited infrastructure, insufficient training, and youth disengagement remain significant barriers. The following discussion situates these findings within the broader literature, highlighting both convergences and unique contributions.

### 5.1 Community Involvement

The findings demonstrate varied levels of community involvement, ranging from highly active participation in festivals and rituals to only occasional engagement in national events. This pattern aligns with Arnstein's (1969) *Ladder of Citizen Participation* and Tosun's (2006) participation typology, which emphasizes the spectrum from tokenistic to genuine community involvement. Similar to studies in Morocco's Chefchaouen (Nakkouch, 2024) and Vietnam (Nam & Thanh, 2024), Kampung Chitty residents are often confined to operational roles (e.g., cooking, guiding), while decision-making power in tourism planning remains limited. This highlights a structural imbalance that risks marginalizing small heritage communities if not addressed.

A notable contribution of this study is the emphasis on intergenerational gaps in participation. Elders were actively engaged, but younger residents were less involved due to education and migration. This mirrors findings in Albania (Menkshi, Braholli, Çobani, & Shehu, 2021), where youth disengagement posed threats to cultural continuity. For Kampung Chitty, targeted strategies for youth engagement are essential to sustain both cultural identity and active participation.

### 5.2 Willingness to Participate

Consistent with global literature, economic benefits emerged as a primary driver of willingness (Chauhan, 2022; Huong et al., 2021). Residents highlighted opportunities for additional income during cultural events, echoing findings from Ethiopia (Tadesse, 2022) and Indonesia (Arizkha et al., 2023), where communities supported CHT primarily due to its potential to enhance livelihoods. However, willingness in Kampung Chitty is not solely economically motivated; it is equally influenced by cultural attachment and the preservation of authentic practices particularly regarding cuisine and rituals. This duality contributes to the literature by showing that economic and cultural motivations can operate simultaneously, rather than exclusively. Cultural authenticity was particularly emphasized by respondents, who insisted on maintaining original recipes and practices even when adapting for tourists. This finding strengthens prior research that identified authenticity as a determinant of visitor satisfaction and community support (Uslu et al., 2023; Zhou et al., 2022). Importantly, the emphasis on cuisine as a cultural marker adds a unique dimension to the discussion, aligning with Fikri et al. (2021), who highlighted food heritage as central to the Chitty identity. Thus, willingness in Kampung Chitty cannot be understood solely in economic terms, but must also be contextualized within identity-driven motivations.

Sustainability awareness also influenced willingness, particularly in terms of environmental concerns and intergenerational cultural continuity. Similar to studies in

India (Kaur et al., 2022) and Indonesia (Hidayat et al., 2023), Kampung Chitty residents expressed the importance of eco-friendly practices and teaching youth cultural traditions. This reflects a growing alignment between sustainable development goals and local community aspirations. Social networks and community norms reinforce this engagement by embedding participation in everyday practice, highlighting the role of social reinforcement in sustaining long-term involvement (Huong et al., 2021; Megeirhi et al., 2020; Ramaano, 2022).

### 5.3 Readiness to Participate

While willingness was strong, readiness presented notable gaps. Residents demonstrated rich cultural knowledge and practical skills in cooking and storytelling, but acknowledged limitations in communication and tourism management skills. This finding echoes studies in Vietnam (Thảo et al., 2024) and Indonesia (Kurniati et al., 2024), where communities possessed strong cultural resources but lacked technical expertise. Training and capacity-building programs are therefore critical to translate willingness into effective participation.

Infrastructure emerged as another readiness barrier, with respondents pointing to insufficient signage, toilets, and resting facilities for visitors. These challenges parallel findings from Lombok, Indonesia (Sayuti, 2023), and Kenya (Abiero et al., 2017), where inadequate facilities hindered CHT growth. Addressing these gaps requires collaboration between local authorities, NGOs, and the community.

Commitment was strongly evident among elders but weaker among younger generations. This generational divide mirrors findings in Thailand (Promburom et al., 2009) and Albania (Menkshi et al., 2021), highlighting the importance of mentoring and hands-on engagement to sustain cultural continuity. The unique contribution here lies in the hybrid identity of the Chitty community, where intergenerational transmission is not just about preserving rituals but also safeguarding a cultural synthesis of Hindu, Malay, and Chinese influences (Moorthy, 2021).

### 5.4 Novel Contributions of the Study

This research contributes to the existing literature on cultural heritage tourism (CHT) in several important ways. First, it reveals the economic–cultural duality within small heritage communities, showing that willingness to participate is influenced not only by financial incentives but also by the pursuit of cultural authenticity, especially in the preservation of food heritage. Second, it underscores the generational dynamics at play, where elders act as cultural custodians while younger generations exhibit a noticeable disengagement from heritage-related activities. Third, by examining the Chitty community, the study highlights the complexities of hybrid cultural identity, illustrating how such hybridity can present both opportunities for cultural promotion and vulnerabilities in maintaining authenticity. Finally, the research identifies readiness constraints, demonstrating that cultural richness alone does not ensure readiness for tourism development, as infrastructural limitations and skill deficiencies continue to pose significant challenges.

### 5.5 Policy and Practical Implications

The findings of this study present several important implications for tourism stakeholders and policymakers. First, capacity-building through targeted training programs in communication, tourism management, and digital marketing can significantly enhance community readiness and participation. Second, infrastructure development should be prioritized, with investments directed toward improving visitor-friendly facilities such as signage, restrooms, and resting areas to create a more welcoming environment for tourists. Third, youth engagement initiatives, such as storytelling sessions, culinary workshops, and heritage education, can encourage younger generations to take an active role in preserving and promoting their cultural heritage. Fourth, inclusive planning is vital, ensuring that community members are involved not only in operational aspects but also in the broader tourism decision-making processes. Lastly, fostering partnerships with NGOs, universities, and tourism boards can help provide the necessary resources, technical expertise, and support for sustainable tourism development. Collectively, these measures would not only empower Kampung Chitty to strengthen its cultural heritage tourism efforts but also serve as a replicable model for other small heritage communities facing similar challenges.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed for policymakers, tourism stakeholders, and community leaders to strengthen cultural heritage tourism development. First, capacity-building initiatives should be prioritized by organizing workshops on communication, tourism management, and digital marketing, alongside training programs in guiding, storytelling, and cultural presentation—particularly tailored to engage younger generations. Second, infrastructure improvement is essential, including the enhancement of visitor facilities such as signage, public restrooms, resting areas, and walkways, as well as investing in community-based tourism infrastructure that upholds both cultural and environmental sustainability. Third, youth engagement programs should be implemented through mentorship schemes that enable elders to transfer cultural knowledge to younger generations, and by incorporating cultural heritage education within local schools and community activities. Fourth, inclusive and participatory planning is recommended through the establishment of community advisory boards to ensure residents have a voice in tourism-related decision-making, and by fostering partnerships with NGOs, universities, and tourism boards to encourage bottom-up development approaches. Finally, the promotion of hybrid heritage identity should be emphasized by highlighting Kampung Chitty's unique blend of Hindu, Malay, and Chinese cultural practices as a distinctive tourism brand, while developing niche heritage tourism packages centered on food, rituals, and festivals to attract culturally motivated visitors.

While this study provides important insights, it is not without limitations. The small sample size of five participants, though adequate for qualitative depth, limits generalizability. Findings are context-specific to Kampung Chitty and may not represent other heritage communities with different socio-economic or cultural contexts. Furthermore, the study primarily focused on community perspectives, without integrating the roles of policymakers, NGOs, or tourism operators who influence tourism planning and implementation.

Future studies could build upon this research in several ways to deepen the understanding of cultural heritage tourism dynamics. First, researchers could include larger and more diverse samples that reflect generational, gender, and occupational differences, providing a broader and more representative view of community perspectives. Second, examining decision-making dynamics in tourism planning would offer valuable insights into the extent and effectiveness of community participation and influence in shaping tourism development. Third, comparative studies involving different small heritage communities across Malaysia and Southeast Asia could help uncover contextual variations and shared challenges in sustaining cultural heritage tourism. Fourth, integrating the perspectives of external stakeholders—such as government agencies, NGOs, and tourism operators—would enable a more holistic analysis of the barriers and enablers that shape heritage tourism outcomes. Lastly, employing mixed-methods approaches that combine qualitative insights with quantitative measurements of willingness and readiness could enhance the robustness and depth of future research findings.

In general, this study intends to explore the involvement, willingness, and readiness of the Kampung Chitty community in Malacca to participate in CHT. The findings reveal that while residents exhibit strong cultural pride, deep community attachment, and a willingness to share their heritage, readiness challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, limited technical skills, and youth disengagement constrain their capacity for sustained participation.

The first research objective is to assess current community involvement, was met, with evidence showing that most elders actively contribute to festivals, rituals, and cultural promotion, while younger members participate less frequently. The second objective, to identify factors influencing willingness—was achieved by demonstrating that both economic incentives and cultural authenticity motivate participation, alongside sustainability awareness and family traditions. The third objective, to evaluate community readiness—highlighted strengths in cultural knowledge and storytelling skills but also exposed gaps in infrastructure, tourism management, and youth engagement.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature by extending models of community participation (Arnstein, 1969; Tosun, 2006) to small, hybrid cultural communities. It emphasizes the dual role of economic and cultural motivations, the importance of generational dynamics, and the constraints posed by infrastructural deficiencies. Practically, the findings underscore the necessity for inclusive, capacity-building approaches that empower local communities in tourism development.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This study explored the involvement, willingness, and readiness of the Kampung Chitty community in Malacca to participate in cultural heritage tourism (CHT). The findings reveal that while residents demonstrate strong cultural pride, deep community attachment, and a willingness to share their heritage, readiness challenges such as limited infrastructure, insufficient technical skills, and declining youth engagement constrain their ability to sustain participation. Elders continue to play a central role as cultural custodians, especially in rituals and festivals, while younger members show weaker participation, reflecting generational divides in heritage preservation.

The study offers several novel contributions to the literature. It highlights the dual influence of economic and cultural motivations in shaping willingness to participate, showing that financial benefits alone are not sufficient without cultural authenticity, particularly in relation to food heritage. It also emphasizes intergenerational dynamics, with elders safeguarding traditions while younger generations disengage, creating challenges for long-term continuity. By focusing on the hybrid identity of the Chitty community, the research shows how cultural hybridity both enriches tourism potential and increases vulnerability to change. Finally, the study demonstrates that cultural richness does not automatically equate to readiness, as infrastructural and skill gaps remain significant barriers.

Practically, the findings underscore the need for capacity-building initiatives that equip residents with skills in communication, tourism management, and digital promotion. Infrastructure improvements such as signage, restrooms, and resting areas are essential for enhancing visitor experiences. Youth engagement is particularly critical, and can be fostered through programs like mentorship, heritage education, and workshops that blend storytelling, culinary practices, and cultural presentations. Inclusive and participatory planning is equally important, ensuring that community members are not only implementers but also decision-makers in tourism development. Partnerships with NGOs, universities, and tourism boards can further strengthen community capacity, while promotion strategies that highlight the Chitty community’s hybrid heritage identity can position it as a distinctive cultural tourism destination.

This research, however, is not without limitations. The small sample size, though sufficient for qualitative depth, restricts the generalizability of findings. Results are context-specific to Kampung Chitty and may not represent other heritage communities with different socio-economic or cultural settings. Moreover, the study primarily captured community perspectives without integrating those of policymakers, NGOs, or tourism operators who also influence tourism outcomes.

Future research could build on these findings by including larger and more diverse samples that reflect generational, gender, and occupational variations. Comparative studies across different small heritage communities in Malaysia and Southeast Asia would offer valuable insights into contextual similarities and differences. Incorporating external stakeholders such as government agencies and NGOs would provide a more holistic understanding of the barriers and enablers of community participation. Finally, employing mixed-methods approaches could strengthen the analysis by complementing qualitative insights with quantitative measures of willingness and readiness.

In summary, this study contributes to knowledge by extending models of community participation to small, hybrid cultural communities and emphasizing the interplay between economic and cultural motivations and intergenerational dynamics. Practically, it offers concrete strategies to empower communities through inclusive planning, skills development, and heritage-sensitive tourism practices. By addressing readiness gaps while preserving cultural identity, Kampung Chitty and similar communities can achieve sustainable, community-driven cultural tourism that benefits both residents and visitors, ensuring their heritage thrives for future generations.

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